

GOD'S  
FOOL



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# G O D ' S F O O L

A Koopstad Story

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS *pseud.*

AUTHOR OF THE SIN OF JOOST AVELINGH



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO  
ALL MY FELLOW-KOOPSTADERS  
IN THE FOUR VAST QUARTERS OF  
OUR MEAN LITTLE GLOBE

There was a man once—a satirist. In the natural course of time his friends slew him, and he died. And the people came and stood about his corpse. "He treated the whole round world as his football," they said, indignantly, "and he kicked it." The dead man opened one eye. "But always toward the Goal," he said.

There was a man once—a naturalist. And one day he found a lobster upon the sands of time. Society is a lobster; it crawls backward. "How black it is!" said the naturalist. And he put it in a little pan over the hot fire of his wit. "It will turn red," he said. But it didn't. That was its shamelessness.

There was a man once—a logician. He picked up a little clay ball upon the path of life. "It is a perfect little globe," said his companions. But the logician saw that it was not mathematically round. And he took it in his hands and rubbed it between them, softly. "Don't rub so hard," said his companions. And at last he desisted, and looked down upon it. It was not a bit rounder, only pushed out of shape. And he looked at his hands. They were very dirty.

There was a man once—a poet. He went wandering through the streets of the city, and he met a disciple. "Come out with me," said the poet, "for a walk in the sand-dunes." And they went. But ere they had progressed many stages, said the disciple, "There is nothing here but sand." "To what did I invite you?" asked the poet. "To a walk in the sand-dunes." "Then do not complain," said the poet. "Yet even so your words are untrue. There is heaven above. Do you not see it? The fault is not heaven's. Nor the sand's."



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## GOD'S FOOL.

*The/ma*  
CHAPTER I.

SWEEPS THE READER INTO A CLOUD OF MIST.

SUDDENLY the horses shook themselves, waking up, as it were, from their dull lethargy of damp. They tossed the great drops off their manes, in a quick splash of impatience, once, twice—then once again, with a succession of those nervous shivers that run all down a horse's sides and rattle the harness in a dozen places together. And then one of them neighed, pathetically; and the other hung down his head, as if neighing were hardly worth while. Decidedly, Hendrik Lossell's horses did not like the mist.

"Fie!" said Chris from his box, drawling out the word. And then he said it over again, twice, very briskly. "Fie! fie!" It was the second warning did it. They did not heed the first.

Chris never shook himself. He sat immovable in his long dark-blue winter-coat, his gloved hands holding the reins in his lap. An infinitesimal spray lay all over the surface of the thick frieze. He didn't mind the wet. It wasn't wet. For, in fact, the night was dry, or so a Dutchman would have called it. No rain had fallen. Only a soft white cloud was trailing swiftly over the morasses in a succession of innumerable puffs, as from the mouths of a thousand cannon underground, as if the spirits of the dead men in the waste were warring against the climate that had killed them. And a heavy mantle of gray misery was soaking quietly downward in shivering masses from



the leaden sky, as if the angels would shut out the consciousness of so much condensing rheumatism, and softly, imperceptibly, a bright glitter of moisture was breaking out on every leaf and blade and pebble, upon everybody and everything.

The house was a lonely one. It stood by itself, in its gardens, on the road outside the town; and the nearest group of cottages, some hundred yards distant, had long since sunk away in clouds of vapour. You could not see much more than twenty feet in front of you. And soon you would not be able to see as much as that, for darkness was rapidly closing in over such dull twilight as still feebly struggled with the damp. Already the "seeing" was very blurred and indistinct. It was an April night, by-the-bye, late in the month.

A baker's boy came up the avenue and passed round to the back of the house. Presently he appeared again whistling a dismal tune.

"Bad weather for driving," he remarked as he went by.

"So, so," said Chris cheerily. "One good thing, it keeps dry."

"Yes, it keeps dry," answered the baker's boy. "That's one good thing. Good-night."

And he sank out of sight into the mist, his whistle alone lingering a few seconds longer.

Another quarter of an hour crept by. The darkness grew denser. And presently the clock of the big church-tower—away down in the town—boomed forth the hour of eight. Its echoes crept along the dreary silence, and lay faint upon the air. The chimes which must have prefaced those final strokes had got lost in the mazes of the mist.

Just before the striking of the hour the front-door had suddenly opened, and a man had come running out, and away into the fog.

"Whoever can that be?" thought Chris; but he never speculated long on the unknowable.

He looked up at the lighted window in one corner of the house, on the top story. There were only two stories.

"Terribly fond of the poor creature," he soliloquized, half aloud, "one might think, by the way he keeps the horses out. And that with the infirmenza in all the stables of the neighbourhood. And it's not he will stop at home for fear of anybody's catching it."

Chris remembered his own experiences last year, when he had been bad with this same influenza, and had been obliged to drive his master to the office through the rain, at least a week too soon.

He shook his head reproachfully; and as the drops fell from his hat, he thoughtfully shot them off his sleeve with finger and thumb.

"A bad master," he murmured. "Seems to me the bad masters get all the good servants in these parts. Perhaps that keeps them bad." He gazed vaguely into the gathering darkness, as if searching for a solution of this mystery. And the clouds of white mist drizzled upwards, and the clouds of gray mist drizzled down.

One of the horses sighed—a long-drawn sigh. With the swelling of his sides the carriage creaked drearily forward, and then sank back again. The other whisked his tail.

Chris yawned. But even as he did so, he straightened himself and arranged the reins. A man's shadow had passed rapidly across the white blind of the lighted window.

"Up at last," said Chris to himself. After a pause he added cautiously, "At least."

A few moments later, however, the house-door was thrown open with a bang which startled the horses. They bounded erect at once in a tremble of expectation. "Wo—a!" cried the coachman, tightening his grasp, and reaching for the whip from its holder. The little brougham quivered, as if recoiling for a spring.

A gentleman leaped, at one rush, from the dark hall

into the dark carriage, throwing, as he passed, the single word "Home!" in the direction of the box.

The carriage-door banged. "Allez, boys!" cried Chris, for so much French do all Dutch coachman understand, and all Dutch horses also. The little brougham jumped forward, and ran away into the fog.

It hurried along almost noiselessly in the clinging whiteness that seemed unwilling to let it pass, so tightly did the mist close round, deadening every sound with its dull weight. Presently, however, the door banged again. Chris glanced round quickly, impatiently. Only the close carriage behind him, and the horses trotting briskly down the road in front.

"I do wish he would learn to shut the door when he gets in," muttered Chris angrily; "it's always falling open unexpectedly. We shall have an ugly accident some day in a crowded street," and he whipped up the horses, already going fast enough.

Once within the town-gates, he found it necessary to slacken his speed. The gas-lamps, few and far between, lay like blurs of yellow fog amidst the white. Streets, in which there was barely room for two vehicles to pass each other, were cut by steam-tram-lines. Chris peered forward a little anxiously, keeping his steeds well in hand. After a minute or two he came to a narrow crossing, near a corner, and here he checked them into a walk. The streets seemed sufficiently deserted, one would think, only you can never be quite sure. "See Misfortune before she sees you," says Chris's friend the County Almanac.

A moment earlier Chris had heard his master in the carriage. That gentleman had coughed, and struck something, doubtless inadvertently, against the glass behind the box. Now, in turning the corner, the coachman was surprised, and heartily annoyed, by a second click of the lock, softer this time, as if the door were being gently drawn to. He greeted it with a round oath at Mynheer Lossell's



clumsiness, and, without deigning to glance backwards again, he cautiously wriggled round an awkward bend, and then once more slackened the reins. After that he did not check his pace till he turned into a broad avenue, and drew up at his master's door. No one moved inside the carriage. The coachman cast a reproachful glance at the lighted entrance. You could see the gas-lamps flaring steadily in the vestibule behind the glass doors. No one moved in the hall. Evidently the sound of the advancing wheels had not been heard in the house.

He put his whistle to his lips, but, even in the very act, he hesitated, and let it drop again. He had never required to whistle on behalf of Mynheer—only for Mevrouw. Mynheer was often out of the carriage before it had properly stopped, long before the manservant had run down the steps to meet him.

He peeped cautiously down over his shoulder. He could make out nothing in that manner. An uncomfortable, indefinite wonder caused him to slip from his box, speaking soothingly to his horses the while, and so cautiously approach the brougham window. One glance, and all hesitation was gone—the carriage was empty.

He bounded on to his seat again, and, with a cut of the whip at the astonished horses, he swept round the short drive, and away again into the mist.

Old Mulder, attracted at last by this rapid exit, stood open-mouthed in the wide hall-door, staring at the backward reflection of the carriage-lamps, flickering like lucifer matches in the darkness. And after a moment even that faint flicker died away.

“He must have fallen out,” said Chris to himself over and over again, as he raced down the road towards the corner where he had last heard the door sink into the slot. “He must have fallen sideways in a fit or something. See what comes of his careless ways!”

He stopped abruptly at the cross-roads. No one there.

Nothing to be seen. Nothing to be heard. He called—softly, then louder—"Mynheer!" Whiteness, stillness. The drip of water, the glitter here and there of smooth surfaces, and long lines of drops. And the audible rustle of a Dutch mist. Pat! Pat! Pat!

"Mynheer!"

He bent forward, following the stretch of shining streets with scrutinizing eyes. The chimes began to ring down tremulously from the tower. Half-past eight!

He drove on cautiously, still tracing the road on both sides with careful question; he drove out of the city, into the deathly loneliness of the shrouded fields, still repeating, with bated cry, his master's name.

Not far from the house in front of which he had waited, he met them, a whole crowd of them, confused, alarmed, excited in that frenzy of mingled horror and delight which a great catastrophe calls forth among lookers-on. They were all crying together, in crazy, distorted lamentation and amaze. Chris threw back his horses on their haunches. What was wrong? For the love of heaven, what was wrong?

A new outcry greeted him. They sprang back in alarm from the frightened, struggling horses looming in a cloud of steam. The light poured across their eager faces distorted with fear. Over the champing of the horses' bits and the screaming of the women a man's voice rose.

"Lossell's Chris, as I'm alive! Would you believe it? Of all people, Lossell's Chris!"

"And why not Lossell's Chris?" cried that personage in a white fury, half rising from his box-seat with uplifted whip. "What's the matter? Where's my master? What is wrong?"

"Wrong?" echoed a chorus of voices; and the shrieks redoubled. Somebody wailed: "Oh, how shall we tell him!"—a woman. And then there was a lull of silence.

"Wrong?" continued the man's voice tranquilly.

“There’s only this wrong, coachman. There’s murder wrong, that’s all.”

And as he spoke a cry came from the distant house, a cry as if of the voice of a trumpet, deep and strong and irresistible, over the sleeping country and all the far white fields :

“Murder ! most awful murder ! O Christ, murdered yet living, dost Thou know of the deed ?”

A man stood at the open window, his face uplifted towards the starless sky.

## CHAPTER II.

SHOWS THAT THE STORY WILL BE A HIGHLY RESPECT-  
ABLE ONE.

THE fool sat in his room, by the fireside, with his hands in his lap. His eyes were closed. They were always closed. God had closed them. Many years ago.

In his youth? Well, hardly in his youth, if we distinguish our ages by their succession, for the fool had always been a child.

But he remembered when he had been a happy child. He remembered it vaguely, objectively, as we remember a dream we have dreamed or a book we have read. Not with a poignant consciousness of loss, but with a distant envy cheered by hope. To know of happiness is to believe it possible. Whatever has been, can be; whatever can be, may be mine. And from moment to moment he lived in the present, which is his all, expecting it to change and grow pleasanter, more like that other impression which still lies next to it; and, lo, the present is gone, and another present is there, and hope remains.

Many of our best friends he missed; but our most cruel foe—memory—was also a stranger to him. Not that he could not remember, only he could not call up and live over again as past, with any degree of actuality, half-forgotten phases of joy or sorrow, the heart's experience, or the mind's. He recalled how he had burnt his hand badly more than a quarter of a century ago; he recalled it as if it were yesterday, and a troubled look came over his face, and he shrank back in alarm. But he smiled when they told him that his

mother was dead, and he said that it was not true, and pointed in the direction of her young picture against the wall. He knew that it hung there; they had told him.

How had they told him? you will say. This man to whom God had refused both the light of His sun and the light of the human voice? What message from the outside world could pierce the darkness in which he lay, blind and deaf? Hush, hush! let me tell my story in my own way. Yes, you are right, he was blind and deaf.

He could not remember many things, he had not many things to remember; yet this morning, as he sat there in the loneliness of his room—the loneliness of his life—scattered fragments of the past came rolling across his mind like beads from a broken necklace. He caught them up here and there as they passed him, not heeding, unable to rearrange, the lost symmetry of the string.

There had been a time, long years ago—more than thirty years ago, only to him it was not a memory, but a sensation—a time when it had seemed as if all the gifts of fortune had been showered down upon his head, a golden, curly head, gilded by the sunshine of half a dozen summers. All the children of the neighbourhood that were old enough to feel envy had envied little Elias Lossell. His father was the great merchant and town councillor, Hendrik Lossell, who, from being a nobody, had suddenly risen to the rank of “somebody’s husband” by his marriage with the only daughter and heiress of old Elias Volderdoes, the biggest rogue and most respected tea-jobber in Koopstad. For Koopstad, though only a little place, had nothing provincial about it, and vied with Amsterdam or any other great city in its simplification of all social distinctions according to the needs of the nineteenth century. The only casts it still recognized were connected with the Mint, and the one Order it now invariably honoured was the money-order. It looked down with supreme contempt upon those out-of-the-way sister-cities which still ventured to maunder



about their "old families"; such ideas might have answered very well in their day, but they would not do for anyone in Koopstad (except the old families themselves) since the railway had brought it within forty minutes of the capital. You were always getting into awkward predicaments for want of a definite limit; now, with the new standard, as imported by the new train, no misconceptions were possible. You applied the decimal system, with due regard to proportion, and there you were. A man possessed of a hundred thousand florins was deserving of a certain amount of respect; a man possessed of two hundred thousand florins had a claim to exactly four times as much esteem, and so on. When you got beyond a million, the good citizens of Koopstad dropped their voices and folded their hands, as their fathers had done in church. Old Elias Volderdoes had got beyond the million. He had done so on that last occasion when he had taken up the Government commission for the damaged cargo of the *Ino*. It's an old story. They made him something after that—President of the Chamber of Commerce, I believe.

And they took off their hats to him a little lower. The worthiest of them—the "well-intentioned burghers," as the rich people called them—regulated the sweep of their hats through the air by the same mathematical rule which governed their hearts' esteem. You might have set up an algebraic equation—unconsciously, but automatically, exact—between the angle of the circle of their salute and the income of the person they saluted. The salute was old-fashioned, but the idea entirely modern, as new as most of the fortunes which graciously waved a benedictory response.

I am not speaking evil of Koopstad. Heaven forbid! I am merely anxious to prove that we are not out-of-the-way people—you can get to Amsterdam in less than forty minutes if you take the express—and that these Lossells for whose tragic story I ask your brief attention need not necessarily have lived in our quite neighbourhood, but might

have done honour to the big city which you inhabit, unless yours is the melancholy one where they only do homage to a tea-jobber, when he doesn't cheat, and remains poor.

Hendrik Lossell, then, from being recognized by hardly anybody but his creditors, suddenly dropped into the very obtusest angle of salutation through his marriage with Margaretha Volderdoes. He loved her—so he said; and it is very possible that he loved Margaretha Volderdoes rich; we need not inquire whether he would have loved her poor, for she wasn't. And she loved him; she would have loved him under any circumstances, as long as he could lift to her pure forehead those great black eyes, behind which there was nothing but a machine for counting dollars, but which seemed to spread like very lakes of liquid tenderness.

So they loved each other, and it was all very beautiful and sentimental; but old Elias did not properly appreciate sentiment, and it seems an extraordinary thing that he should have let them marry merely because they were in love. The old ladies of Koopstad still shake their heads over this mystery; but they need not ask me about it, for I can not tell them any fresh particulars, no more than the "Christian Reformed" minister's wife, who knows all the scandals of the town, including every original or unoriginal sin that has been committed there during the thirty-seven years of her residence in the place. I have a shrewd suspicion, if you ask me, that we all of us, however old or wealthy we may be, retain a soft spot somewhere in our hearts that hardens last; and, if such spot there be, you will probably find it is a mother or a daughter—perhaps, more rarely, a sister or—well, no, hardly a wife.

So they were married, and lived happily—all through the honeymoon, in which better-matched couples than they invariably quarrel. It is a bad sign, that, too smooth a honeymoon. And a few months later Margaretha had learned that you must not marry a man for his eyes.

People tell you they are a mirror of the soul. And yet Hendrik Lossell's soul was far from—soft.

He was not a bad man; he was worse—one of those men who are not bad enough to get better. He was not interested in much except himself, and he was not even interested in himself subjectively, as an independent “I.” The object of all his attention was the firm of “Volderdoes Zonen, tea-merchants,” incorporated, to the advantage of the civilized world, in the person of Hendrik Lossell.

For old Elias had departed this life after having remained just long enough to thoroughly initiate so apt a pupil as his son-in-law into the mysteries of money-making wholesale. This fortunate dispensation—the remaining, of course, not the removal—Hendrik Lossell had accepted as a personal attention to himself, and it had put him into so good a temper with the government of the world in general that he had written down a double amount opposite the name of the firm on the Church charity list for the year—“Volderdoes Zonen, six hundred florins.” “A worthy successor!” said the minister’s wife. But that was the Church minister’s wife; Volderdoes Zonen had nothing to do with Dissenters.

When the little Lossell was born they called him Elias. The name was ugly, but it was the fond grandpapa’s; and, besides, an ugly name looks well in business. It sounds old-fashioned, and “established 1791,” and all that kind of thing. “Our Puritan forefathers,” you know, and the strict uprightness and straightforward dealing of those good old times. What a “solid” impression it would make when young Elias was a middle-aged man himself, and sat behind the great office table, with old Elias’s portrait above his head. He would point to it, over his shoulder, benignantly: “My grandfather. I am named after him. His father was the founder of our house. If you leave the mixing to us, we can let you have it at two seventeen and three-quarters.” Lossell’s heart glowed at the thought.

In the meantime the little Elias, having wept the customary tears over that preliminary sea-sickness which seems inseparable from all infancy, sailed over as smooth a life's ocean as falls to the lot of any human being, big or little. His grandfather, who lived to see the child's second birthday, worshipped the very ground he trod on. His mother, having recovered in him his father's eyes, poured out upon his small existence all the love which had found no former outlet. His father let him alone. In one word, his happiness was complete.

And so, when he was five years old, his mother died. Within a year his father married again—married “someone to look after Elias.” The someone was a merchant's daughter, a young thing, ready to hand, for her father had business connections with Volderdoes Zonen. She slapped Elias. That was her way of looking after him. It did not answer as well as his father's.

Presently there were two cradles in the old house, and twins in the cradles, and that put Elias's nose definitely out of joint. Matters did not improve when his two little half-brothers stepped out of their cradles and on to his toes. I wonder: Is that why they call them step-brothers, because they step into your place in the heart of that imitation article which your father bade you call “mamma” the other day, and which seemed so kind to you at first? Elias's stepmother's kindness had not even held out the regulation nine months' length

Hendrik and Hubert, the twins, now began to enjoy life in their turn; their spell of “good times” was to last longer, fortunately for them, than Elias's. The landscape might have reminded you of one of those Alpine scenes when it has already begun to rain on the mountain, while the valley is still bright with sunshine. Not that the inhabitants of the valley can help it. Nor that they feel any the happier because the mountaineers are in the dark.

The younger boys were fairly fond of their elder broth-

er. They had no objection to him. He was not in their way. And they played with him, and bullied him, as children will. He, on his part, adored them with unreasoning worship. There was only a difference of some half-dozen years between him and them. The second wife used to sit watching the trio at their play. Elias had retained that victoriously pleading look in the lustrous eyes over which his poor mother had so often sighed and prayed. He had a noble forehead—high and pure, as hers had been—and the golden curls fell clustering over it and down to his shoulders. He was tall and well-grown for his age, neither very clever nor remarkably stupid—backward if anything, and more eager to romp than to study. He was fully seven years old before his father put him to learn his letters—it being Hendrik Lossell's theory that the best leap follows on a recoil—and it took him as long to distinguish U from V as if he had been an ancient Roman.

The mother looked at her own boys. They were sturdy little Dutchmen, the kind of children no one but the mother looks at twice. She hated that other child.



## CHAPTER III.

### AND ALSO ALTOGETHER COMFORTABLE.

ELIAS was nine years old when the world, with all its good and evil, died away from him, and left him alone.

It was his little brother Hubert who, half in fun and half in wantonness, pushed down a flower-pot from the ledge of the tall nursery-balcony on the laughing face upturned to greet him.

"Hubby! Hubby! look at the yellow bird on the big laburnum-tree!"

Crash!

Hubby was leaning over the parapet, kicking his white legs against its columns, with gravely puckered face, uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

"There is no hope," said the doctor; "there is not the slightest hope. It is a good thing there is not."

He said it harshly. Standing in the darkened room by the small iron bedstead on which the boy lay insensible, he looked from the stepmother, dissolved in self-pitying lamentations, to the father, hard and impatient, annoyed, perhaps, to be called away in business-hours. He did not think they cared much; and he said it harshly because he himself was sorry for the child.

"Why a good thing?" asked the father abruptly.

"It is better sometimes, especially at his age, to die than to live on," replied the doctor.

Hendrik Lossell stood for a moment terror-struck. Then he burst out: "You mean that he will recover!"

That probably his brain will be injured—that he will be mad, or an idiot, or whatever you call it! And he will live on for ever—these idiots always do! Hey? speak out: do you mean that?”

The doctor busied himself with his patient, disdaining to answer.

Suddenly Hendrik Lossell turned upon his sobbing wife:

“Peace!” he said fiercely. “Go out of the room. What are you howling for? For pity of the child, perchance! Go—go out of the room—do you hear me?—and pray for yourself, not for him.”

She obeyed him, gathering her wraps about her, and keeping her handkerchief to her eyes, as she slouched out of his sight.

He shut the door carefully behind her, and then he came back to the bedside.

“Doctor,” he said menacingly, “let us understand each other. You are right; that child must either recover completely, or not recover at all.”

He spoke very quietly, but with such concentrated meaning that the physician, accustomed as he was to scenes of horror, trembled at the words.

“I shall do what I can,” he answered gruffly. “The issues are not in my hand, Mynheer Lossell.”

For a few moments the merchant evidently hesitated, at war with himself. He walked up and down the little room in the dark, his straight, strong figure swaying to and fro. Then he said—slowly and distinctly—his hand on the door-handle—his face averted:

“I did not intend that you must, in any case, have power to cure the child. But, if he recovers, he must recover completely. If he does not regain the full use of his faculties, better that he should not return to life at all. Should either of these eventualities occur—I refuse to believe in the possibility of any other—you will allow me to

consider that mortgage annulled which I still hold on your house. Only, if you please, in the case of cure or no cure. Half a cure is worse than no cure. Half a cure, for me, would mean foreclosure. Good-day, doctor."

The doctor answered never a word. He swore under his breath in the silence of the sick-room. "Foreclosure it shall be," he muttered to himself, "as far as lies in my power, so help me God! But whatever can the Right Worshipful mean?"

He called him Right Worshipful, you see, because his fellow-citizens had rightly considered that Hendrik Lossell's income was entitled to a place in the councils of the town.

Foreclosure it was, accompanied by envy, malice, and all uncharitableness; so much so that people began to ask each other whether the rich merchant was angry with Dr. Pillenaar for having saved his son's life. Lossell did his reputation severe injury in Koopstad by the scandal he called up around this matter; but he did not mind such considerations a trifle in comparison to the satisfaction of having his own way. He knew that the burghers could not be guilty of contempt, for any lengthy period, of a man who drove his carriage and pair. So he persecuted Dr. Pillenaar, because Dr. Pillenaar had thwarted him, and left the rest to time and the popular sense of what is fit.

Still, people wronged him when they hinted that he was weary of his eldest son. He was quite willing that the boy should live, though, perhaps, he would not have grieved over-much to see him die. But the semi-recovery of Elias was indeed a terrible blow to him, and it was not till after the merchant's death that Koopstad found out the exact reason why.

In the meantime the object of all this solicitude, after hovering for many days between heaven and earth, turned

the wrong corner and decided to live. Much to the doctor's astonishment, and no less to his fierce satisfaction, Elias's strong little body asserted its right to continued existence, whatever might become of the poor child's mind. He rose up, as it were, in his sleep, and walked about, and even spoke—unintelligible words at first, the indivisible rigmarole of a dreamer; then slow, short sentences, as the sounds fell gradually into their proper places again. But he could receive no answer to his questions. Some fatal injury had been done to the apparatus of hearing by the force of the blow. The doctors said that the tympanum was intact in both ears; they could not account for the absence of all power of perceiving sound. It would not have been of much use to Elias could they have explained the reason of his deafness. He would not have been less incurably deaf.

Some subtler influence was at work, out of reach of the wise men's probing, eating away the very strength of the child's brain.

He was deaf. Well, so be it. It was a terrible affliction, but they must make the best of it, said his father. Many men were deaf who yet did their work—ay, and left their mark—in the world. Elias, as soon as he seemed sufficiently to have recovered from his illness, was set to learn the deaf-and-dumb alphabet.

"An easy thing enough for him," remarked Lossell, "considering that he isn't even dumb. He might have been dumb, you know, Judith. He can very well go into the business, all the same."

Elias, however, did not find the deaf-and-dumb alphabet as easy as his father had expected. He struggled over it with almost hopeless failure, and there was something very pathetic in that constantly reiterated, "But I don't understand," which he sent out into the silence around him like a futile appeal for help. His great eyes lighted up for a moment with something of their old lustre under the impulse of that passionate questioning. But soon the

strange dimness again sank over them. "He did not really care to understand," said his teacher with a shrug of the shoulders. "He was the most unintelligent pupil that he—the master—had ever come across."

"The child is too stupid," Hendrik Lossell groaned to himself. "It is not his deafness that is at fault, but his stupidity. If that fool of a Pillenaar had only understood both the boy's welfare and his own! What am I to do with him in this condition? There ought to be a law against wills like that of old Volderdoes."

And then he made some *sotto voce* allusions to his deceased father-in-law, which were not at all in harmony with the veneration which he had vowed to the chief of the great house, whether alive or dead.

Elias understood that he was very naughty, and he ran away into the woods and flung himself on the ground and cried. He did not like crying, but sometimes he could not help it. And he lost himself in the wood, following after a bird of strange plumage which he had never seen before. He thought he knew all the birds that ever existed. He was quite sure that he knew at least thirty-seven kinds. He had counted them up on his fingers. And he was acquainted with any number of plants, and flowers, and funny wild things, only it tired his head to remember the names. It tired his head now far more than it used to, before Hubby threw the flower-pot at him. His head never used to be really tired before. And now, somehow, he was always having the headache, not always equally bad, but always that dull pain over the eyes. He could not tell them about his headaches. They would only say it was naughty of him. As he dared say it was.

He came home late from that escapade in the woods, and he read in his stepmother's angry looks the reproaches he could no longer hear.

Mind you, this is not a melancholy story, and I will not



have it designated as such, however appearances may seem to be against me. It is essentially a comfortable story, intended to show the comfortable people that this is really a comfortable world, and that they have a right to be comfortable in it.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NEW LIFE BEGINS.

THERE was a big dinner-party at the Lossells'. Now, what more cheerful than a dinner-party? Especially for those who, snugly established by their own fireside, with a book and a valid excuse, remember that, but for such valid excuse, they too must have been there.

There was a dinner-party. The Lossells were old-fashioned people, and they sat down to table at half-past five. They made up for beginning so early by sitting on late. And the children came in to dessert, also in the old-fashioned manner, somewhere near half-past seven.

Sixteen ladies and gentlemen, including the host and hostess, were gathered round the oblong dining-table, the ladies mostly in high dresses of some sombre silk, plum-coloured or bronze or spinach-green, with black-lace trimmings; the gentlemen in buttoned frock-coats and black ties—portly gentlemen, with sparse hair and solemn, stupid faces, and parchmenty cheeks, from which the counting-house had drained away all pulsation, leaving only a yellow smoothness of unmeaning dignity. The long narrow board—there was nothing festive about it—stood covered with a number of dessert dishes in painfully perceptible lines: plump, overladen dessert-dishes, full of hypertrophied fruit and sweetmeats, dishes that seemed to say, "Look at me; I can afford to pay." And the guests—especially the ladies—stared back with depressing indifference. They also could afford to pay. Had that not been the case, they would not have been there.

There were no other flowers on the table than the big bouquet of red and pink roses, done up by the florist (done up tight), in a crystal centrepiece; but here and there stood a fat silver candlestick, with a thin candle, rising up like a plumed officer among the martial array of crackers and pears. And a couple of fat-bellied porcelain lamps, garlanded with a splendour of blooms such as Nature might vainly yearn to imitate, dropped their oil with a tranquil solemnity befitting the feast. The great gilt chandelier, with its dozens of candles, was not lighted. Only its covering of yellow gauze had been removed. To tell the truth, Mevrouw Lossell had made up her mind that she would light the candles if the Burgomaster's wife had accepted her invitation. But the Burgomaster's wife had written to say that she was indisposed.

"Indisposed to come," said Lossell in his rough manner, as he threw the letter back to his wife. "She says she isn't well enough, does she? Not well enough with us, she means." And so the candles remained unlighted.

None the less, there was light enough—what with the various lamps and candlesticks scattered about [nay, pompously planted] on mantelpiece and sideboard—to brighten even that big room, with its mahogany furniture and dark-red wall-paper. It was not the absence of outer illumination which left the assembly in the dark. You may put pounds upon pounds of wax-candles round a coffin, but you can't make it a cheerful object by so doing. It was the dignity which did it, and the consciousness—what ho, a moralist!—that only poor people laugh.

Let us not speak irreverently of these worthy people and their pleasures. The occasion was, indeed, not such an one as warrants a smile. They were working their way through a better dinner than falls to the share of most rich men. It is an irritating—nay, more, a deeply-saddening—problem for a wise dyspeptic to ponder: the superabundance in this

little world of ours of things cookable, and the extreme rarity of cooks.

Mevrouw Lossell was telling all about the Burgomaster's wife to a chocolate manufacturess—a cousin—who sat four places off. Farther down the table Mevrouw Lossell's sense of propriety would not have allowed her voice to reach.

"Yes, the dear Burgomasteress is ill," she was saying. "She wrote me an affecting little note. I was so sorry, but I could not put off my party. The doctor has absolutely forbidden her to go out."

"Except in an open carriage," answered the chocolate-makeress tartly. "I saw her driving in the park yesterday with those fat-faced children of hers."

This lady could afford to be plain-spoken, the Burgomaster's wife having honoured her last year's banquet with her presence, and she could enjoy a little quiet spitefulness, for—incomprehensibly enough, as it seemed to her judgment—the Koopstaders persisted in preferring adulterated tea to adulterated cocoa. "They don't know what is good for them," she would say, quoting from her husband's best advertisement. "Tea weakens the nerves, but cocoa strengthens the blood."

If this be true, let us hope that the Koopstaders will absorb Johnsonian quantities of the emollient beverage. Their nerves will be all the better for a little weakening.

"Yes, so she tells me," Mevrouw Lossell remarked coolly, in answer to the information she had just received. It was not easy to discomfort Mevrouw Lossell. Her nerves were of the genuine Koopstad type. "I must say I prefer healthy-looking children. Some people's children make you wonder whatever their parents feed them on!"

The cousin replied only by a nod and a smile, flung across to her hostess, over a gathering swell of interposing voices. She ignored the attack on her own chocolate-nurtured offspring. And she contented herself by remarking to her immediate neighbour: "And some poor little creat-

ures look so pinched and wasted you cannot help asking whether they get anything to eat at all."

But the stout tobacco-planter next to her, even had he understood her meaning, would have felt no interest in the subject. True to the rule of his life, he had already eaten too much that evening. It was impossible for him to realize the condition of anyone who could eat too little. And it more than sufficed for him that *Mevrouw Lossell* had provided him—*John Prui*m—with so capital a dinner. They were beginning to hand the dessert. It was seven o'clock. He loved *Mevrouw Lossell*.

The dessert brought in the children. They came through the great dark door behind the red damask screen, and round into the full light of the dinner-table, with its glitter of silver and crystal. They advanced—with children's solemn hesitation—towards the confusion of heaped-up fruit and disordered wineglasses, bordered by that circle of ponderous faces all turned towards them in a sudden lull of languid interest. They saw nothing—absolutely nothing—but the dazzling white of the tablecloth, and their mother's meaningless face at the farther end.

The twins were in front, hand-in-hand, their squat figures clad in black velveteen blouses, and behind them came *Elias*, also in black velvet, but in a tailor-made suit, with a dainty white waistcoat, and black stockings instead of red. For *Elias* was now nearly eleven. His long fair curls poured down in silken streams upon his shoulders. *Mevrouw Lossell* had wanted to cut them off long ago. It was so silly for a great boy to wear curls, she said. *Elias* had also wanted them cut off for the same cause. But some reason or other made the merchant say "No." Perhaps in the depths of his money-loving soul there still occasionally stirred a soft recollection of the woman who had loved him more than money. It must have been so, for, one day, after a fresh altercation about the hairdresser, he suddenly said to *Elias*—on the fingers, for the child had now learnt to un-



derstand that language easily: "Your mother had such curls as yours, Elias." He did not say it till his wife had left the room. Elias never asked again to have the curls cut off.

The child was tall, too tall for his age, and his high forehead and delicately-veined cheeks were thin and pale enough to explain the chocolate-lady's apprehension. Yet it was not true that he did not get enough to eat—not true, in fact, that he wanted for anything, except affection. He was still the rich town-councillor's eldest son. And he lived in the lap of that substantial luxury of which the Dutch have possessed the secret for centuries. The landscape around him was the same as it had always been, only the warmth had gone out of it when his mother died.

His was a swinging, easy step, as a rule, despite his deafness. Nature had accorded him that mysterious grace of movement, most intangible of beauties, which seems to mould immediately and imperceptibly the most various surroundings into a framework for one consistent central figure. He was not, perhaps, handsome according to the rules of straight lines and clear colours. But the child was interesting—interesting against your will. And when in the middle of his boisterous play he paused for a moment by your side, and turned full upon you those great eyes of his, already dimmed by the presage of deepening trouble, a something in your heart awoke to say, "God bless him!" before you turned away to talk of yesterday's dinner or tomorrow's dress. He could not hear you. He would run away, shouting, "Hubby! Henky!" with a voice that rang out like a clarion-note, and their shrill cries would come pealing back in futile answer—forgetful of his infirmity with the forgetfulness of children and grown-up men.

I do not think that infirmity weighed very heavily upon him as yet. It was awkward, he felt, and hindered him in his intercourse with other children; but it did not prevent his playing as much as his heart could wish. And when-

ever he wanted anything, he could ask for it; and children, as a rule, are far more anxious to talk than to be talked to. Being talked to means being "don'ted," as a rule. Elias found that, notwithstanding his deafness, people could easily don't him far more than he liked. And his immediate *entourage* had learnt to speak to him on the fingers. There had been some talk at first of trying to teach him to watch the movement of the lips, but this had been postponed, by the doctor's advice, till his head was stronger. The father had taken comfort. He had come across a couple of deaf and dumb gentlemen in Amsterdam who read everything that was said off the lips with perfect ease. They even spoke, and it was quite possible to understand them if you only took the trouble. They were in business, both of them.

"Your son is not dumb, you tell me?" said the director of the great deaf and dumb institute. "I will guarantee that, with the most mediocre intelligence, he will be able in the course of eighteen months to understand everything that is said to him by whosoever chooses to speak slowly and distinctly. There is no reason why he should not become as eminent a man of business as yourself."

Lossell travelled back in a fever of delight. He kissed Elias on both cheeks when the boy came running out to welcome him.

The child's chief regret was that his little brothers could not converse with him. Mevrouw Lossell had positively forbidden their learning to do so before they knew the ordinary alphabet. She was afraid of some disastrous results. She could not herself have told you what. But Elias felt very sorry. He was not angry with Hubby.

And now, on the occasion of this dinner-party, he followed the six-year-old twins into the dining-room. He kept his hand on Hub's shoulder, as the little group steered,

with uncertain movement, in the direction of the mistress of the house.

"What an interesting-looking child your stepson is, Mevrouw!" said Judith Lossell's neighbour, a white-haired old grandfather, as they sat watching the boys draw near.

"I do not call him handsome," answered that lady shortly. She was thinking that the old man might as well tell her that Henky and Hubby were interesting looking children too.

"Well, not handsome, perhaps, but striking. Yes, striking. He has the kind of look peculiar to those children who make a noise in the world when they grow up."

"He makes quite noise enough already, I am sure," retorted Mevrouw Lossell indifferently. "Come here, Henky; let me put your lace-collar straight. And say 'How d'ye do?' Hubby, to Mynheer van Veth."

The chocolate-cousin was making overtures to Henky, smiling and nodding over her shoulder, with an outstretched cracker in her hand. She wanted him to come to her, partly because she felt it was her duty to notice the children, and partly because it would give her an opportunity of telling her side of the table that her little Diederik could read words of one syllable, while Henky Lossell did not even know A from B.

Elias stood awkwardly near his stepmother, still clinging, as if with a nervous clutch, to Hubby's velveteens. Old Mr. van Veth had offered him some sweetmeats. The boy did not take them. The old gentleman, looking up in surprise, saw that Elias's eyes were staring vaguely in front of him—away towards a dark corner of the brilliantly-lighted room.

"Good heavens!" he said to himself; "if the boy is deaf, he should look at people. The eyes are the only means of intercourse left."

"Come here, Elias," called out the Town Councillor from his end of the table, as if his eldest son could hear him.

He beckoned to the boy. They often spoke to him in

this manner, exaggerating their gestures that he might read their meaning thus unheard.

The stepmother turned round impatiently.

"Why don't you go to your father, child?" she cried, pointing with her substantial arm. "Don't you see him calling you? Don't pluck at Hubby in that tiresome manner! Can't you leave the poor child alone?"

Elias seemed to take no notice of anything. He stood staring, staring away to that dark corner—over there.

A sudden silence fell upon the guests. *Mevrouw* Lossell's voice, rising over the buzz of conversation, had flattened it down at a blow. People looked in her direction—at her florid, angry features, and at the pale, unconscious face by her side.

"How naughty!" said her sister softly, yet audibly, from a distance.

The chocolate-manufactureess cast an indignant look in the direction of the voice. "Poor child!" she interposed—out aloud. "Elias, boy," ejaculated the father in amazement, "come here."

Judith Lossell heard the remarks of both ladies. They irritated her still more. She half turned in her chair, and seized her stepson's arm and shook it angrily. "You naughty child!" she cried. "Why can't you attend to what your father says?" She trusted to her expression to explain her words—and pointed eagerly across the table.

The shake seemed to awaken Elias to consciousness. He removed his eyes from the cornice, and turned them full on the attentive guests assembled round the dinner-table. Evidently he felt that something was expected of him. He must say something.

"I can't see!" he said.

No one understood the meaning of the words for the first moment. There was a general movement of surprise, of uncertainty. His stepmother sat in annoyed bewilderment,

not daring to make quite certain as yet that this was some miserable trick. His father bent forward as if about to speak. But the wall of his frightened reserve once broken through, Elias burst out, pouring forth all the flood of his childish terror and despair:

"I can't see! I can't see one bit! Papa! mamma! where are you? Didn't we come into the dining-room? I don't know where I am! I don't understand! Touch me, Hubby! It's all dark, and my eyes are open! Oh, papa! what has happened? Oh, papa, papa, papa!"

He burst into tears—into passionate, panic-struck, audible sobs. There was something alarming in the thought that they could not reach the child—alone in his silence and his darkness. The guests started from their seats. Some of the ladies fell back, and, unable to bear the pain of that wild sobbing, broke into sympathetic cries and weeping. The wretched father ran round from his seat with a groan. He caught the child to his arms, and drew him away to an embrasure.

"Hush! hush!" he stammered, as he stroked the golden head. "It will be better presently—better presently. He can't hear me!" he suddenly cried, turning fiercely on the dumfounded faces grouped at some distance from the corner where he had taken refuge. He looked from one to the other. "Make him hear me!" he gasped. "Tell him, somebody—make him understand that it will be all right soon! It is some passing distemper. Comfort him, somebody! Here, you, Judith! No, not you!" He pushed her from him. "O my God! can no one stop his crying like that? It will be all right presently—all right presently."

For a moment he had forgotten himself, and all his hopes and his ambitions. He lifted the child high in his arms, and bent over him, face to face, cheek to cheek, and so—motioning back all sympathy and all help—he bore him away into the silent loneliness of their individual loss.

## CHAPTER V.

### LIGHT AND SHADE.

ELIAS did not immediately become irretrievably blind.

After a few anxious hours his sight returned. He looked round and feebly recognized his father, and stroked his hand. And a little later he sat up in bed and smiled. Then the doctor took his hat and went home; and when the doctor's wife, who had sat up for him, met him in the passage, and said, "Well?" he answered her abruptly, "Don't ask me," and brushed past her into his study and banged the door. It was not Dr. Pillenaar. Elias had cried in vain for Dr. Pillenaar. The man who had ruined Pillenaar dared not ask his aid.

The child grew better without it. For a time, at any rate, he could see. But now under the stress of this new calamity, he confessed to those continual headaches he had not dared to complain of before. His frightened stepmother reproached him for his reticence.

"Yes, I very often have a pain over my eyes," he admitted; "but, mother, I didn't think I might."

This is not a melancholy story. I refuse to be told that it is melancholy. It "ends well." You who can see, and won't, and won't hear, and can, you will envy my blind child yet, when the lights and shadows change.

In the meantime he was more interesting than ever, and the doctors talked him over at the Club.

"There is some permanent injury to the brain from the effects of the original blow," said the physician last called



in. "The communication between it and the organs of sense suffers in consequence. First the hearing was intercepted. Now it is the eyesight."

"I have always said the brain could not entirely recover," interposed Dr. Pillenaar. He was heartily sorry for the patient, but he was a little glad that his prognostic should not have proved erroneous.

"It is like a volcanic territory," began another man, who liked to hear himself speak. "There has been a subsidence, or an eruption, and the telegraph-wires have come down. So long the boy is blind. As soon as the communication is re-established, or succeeds in re-establishing itself, he can see again. You will have another upheaval presently and another crash, and some day it will be with the eyes as with the ears, and no one will be able to put the telegraph-poles up again."

"Poor little chap!" said the doctor who had witnessed the flash of the first telegram, after the interruption, between father and son.

"But, for Heaven's sake," cried Pillenaar excitedly, "you, who have influence with the father, get him to see some great specialist. Get him to take the child to Utrecht, or abroad, if he wants to go farther and fare worse."

The other doctor mentioned this idea to Lossell next time they met. The idea was a good one. And the frightened lad went with his stepmother to Utrecht, and had to undergo the ordeal of the railway journey, and the long wait in that sickening ante-room—all doctors' ante-rooms are sickening, if you are really ill—and the solemn trial with its suspenseful watching of the great man's kindly face. And then, because he was a child, they mercifully sent him away before the final verdict, as if it lightened the victim's doom to leave the sword suspended over his head. Alas! the sword was indeed suspended there, and no medical science could unhook it. The famous oculist could only speak of possibility and hope. The eyes were sound—

strong, healthy, and beautiful still. The danger lay in the brain. "And of diseases of the brain, my dear madam—shall I be absolutely, straightforwardly truthful?—neither I nor the brain-doctors know anything at all as yet."

As long as the attack had not repeated itself, however, there was every hope of its not proving of serious importance. In this all the wise men were agreed. A single seizure might signify nothing; a recurrence would mean ruin. It must be avoided at all cost. A residence of several months in a milder climate was suggested. Could Mynheer Lossell see his way to arranging that it should take place?

"I will sacrifice anything I possess to save the child's eyes," said Hendrik Lossell. "It is a matter of life and death to me—of life and death!"

"Anything he possessed!" People smiled to each other a little sceptically when those words were repeated at the Club. Yet they did wrong. They did not know, to begin with, how much Hendrik Lossell possessed. They could but take off their hats to his carriage in the street, and not to the contents of his strong-box.

So Elias was sent away to Clarens, and instructed to play about in the open air, and to drink as much milk as he could swallow. He did not like the milk, but he liked driving the cows, so they allowed him to combine the two, and he was happy. It was his old nurse, Johanna, who made this arrangement for him, and many others. Mevrouw Lossell could not leave the cares of her household, so Johanna was sent for—Johanna, who had watched over Elias's golden morning, who had loved his mother with unreasoning affection, and who had only left the family because she could not endure the sight of another woman in the dead mistress's place.

She had reproached herself a thousand times for having deserted the orphan, and she accepted Mynheer Lossell's proposal as a message of reconciliation with Heaven. What

mattered it that she was called to face all the terrors of a foreign country, a land of mountains and cataracts, and other traps for the unwary, a land where it would be impossible for her to obtain that bi-hourly cup of coffee which is the fetish of Dutch domestic servants? She bravely answered all the forebodings of her terrified circle of acquaintance with the words, "I shall be caring for Elias," and she went forth undauntedly into the jaws of the Unknown like a female Stanley, with her charge and Mynheer Lossell in a first-class carriage—change at Cologne. Her old mother and three sisters watched the fast train speed away—into the distance—into an infinitesimal black vagueness—into emptiness. There was nothing left of her. Nothing but a memory and a prayer.

She had her coffee at Cologne, but she had no coffee between Cologne and Bâle. She survived the omission. The spell was broken, and I believe she is a contented woman still.

Rooms had been found for her and the child in the house of a widow, whose husband had been Swiss watch-maker in a Dutch country town. The landlady, therefore, spoke a few words of Dutch, and understood a good many more. Had this not been the case, she could hardly have accepted the charge of her lodgers, for Elias was prevented by his infirmity from picking up words of a foreign tongue, as other children would have done; and as for Johanna, to her the whole French language appeared to present no definite sounds of which a rational, full-toned organ of speech could possibly lay hold.

"The people," she said, "are all butterflies, and the French words are just like moths—they go flying, flying past you, and when you succeed in grabbing hold of one of them, it crumbles away to nothing in your hand."

Johanna very seldom caught her moths.

They spent two months together at Clarens, two months of a superbly fading autumn, watching the crimson glow

pale off into an ashen gray. Around them the late roses in neat beds of cultivated colour; before them the blue serenity of far-stretching water, the limpid lake; and opposite, ascending above the sloping masses of russet and golden and faintest yellow—those sylvan splendours of Nature's gorgeous death—o'ertopping all that changes with our changeful seasons, towering high into the presence of the unalterable: the pure summits of eternal snow. The child, whose eyes had never before lifted themselves to any earthly object sublimer than a church weather-cock, now gazed with awe-struck wonder upon these heights that yearn towards the stars. He realized, untold, not so much their loftiness or their purity, as their unbroken silence, the snow-bound unapproachableness in which they rest throughout the ages. It must be very still up yonder, he felt, always still, as in the stillness of his own young heart, on which no ripple ever broke of other laughter than his own. And the mountains drew nigh to him in his loneliness through one of those inexplicable childish whims of sympathy which sometimes bind our early years in a communion with Nature, which we never quite lose in after-life. He would fancy himself a mountain—the mite—tall, majestic, untouched by the world's coming and going, far away in the hush of God, nearer to heaven in the solitude and the silent waiting. And he would nod to the great gray pile beneath the dropping clouds.

"We are friends, you and I," he said aloud.

Johanna poised her uplifted needle in her hand, and stopped to look at him. He was gazing into the lofty distance, into limitless transparent azure, away beyond the mountains, beyond the clouds. Johanna shook her head.

The next moment he was romping through the little garden, the music of his own merriment filling his desolate heart; for Tonnerre had pounced upon him—Tonnerre, the landlady's nondescript spaniel, who owed his tremendous name to the unreasonable rumble by which he invariably showed his discontent. Tonnerre's discontent was chronic.

His health was perfect, though Madame Juberton tried to make everyone, herself included, believe that bodily affliction accounted for his ill temper. It was a pious fraud, common to the womankind connected with grumblers. As a rule, the people who never cease complaining complain without occasion, for you cannot possibly always hit on a just cause of complaint. So they get into the habit of discontinuing their search for a reason, and they soon find out that they can get on far more fluently without.

Illogically, then—for he was intensely illogical, a human failing rarely found in dogs—Tonnerre had taken a great liking to Elias, which he showed him chiefly by pouncing upon him unawares. He had early perceived that the deaf boy could not hear, but only see him, and he utilized the discovery by inventing a game which would suit these unusual circumstances. Elias played with his four-footed companion as often as the latter would permit. Sometimes a little oftener.

The child was happy at Clarens. Everybody was kind to him. Johanna loved him. Madame Juberton, after he had been in her house for nine minutes, loved him too. She was not, you will notice, a very soft-hearted woman. Most women love an afflicted child, when they meet with it, at first sight, and do not take nine minutes to make up their minds about the matter. God bless their motherly hearts!

“Do you know,” said Elias one day, after he had been sitting a long time pensive at his nurse’s feet, “you are—I don’t quite know how—but I think, Johanna, I think you are like mamma. I mean,” he added, after a moment, in a solemn whisper—“I mean mamma in heaven.”

Johanna vigorously shook her head in protest, but his eyes were not turned towards her.

“I can’t say how I mean like,” he went on thoughtfully, “not like her portrait in the library, but like her to me, somehow. Like the smell of roses, you know. They



look so different till you smell them, and then they are the same. And it isn't the smell, Johanna. I don't know what it is. It's the feel, I think. Since I am deaf, I seem to feel different. And when it—it tingles, then it reminds me. And the tingles go together. I can't make you understand. But I understand for myself. It's the tingle does it, not the smell."

She understood—indistinctly, yet enough. And she caught up the little fellow in her arms.

Two days afterwards she found him crying in his bed—a great boy of eleven. Fie upon him! What was he crying for? He did not dare to tell her. At last it came out, among the sobs. "It was so wicked of him, and he was ashamed of it. But the thought had come upon him that Tonnerre was like mamma."

And so love—the divine word beyond human utterance—stammered forth its first broken accents upon the silence of the deaf boy's heart.

A glow of kindness spread around and over him, bringing with it undefined reminiscences of the opening scenes of his existence. People not only made those necessary signs to him, which they had always made since he had lost his hearing, but they added superfluous ones—little unexpected nods, and smiles, and twitches of the eyes, which came to him now as so many gentle words and terms of endearment come to more fortunate children. Johanna would sit watching to catch his eye; and his glad, frank flash of recognition would amply repay her for any tenderness she bestowed upon him. Madame Juberton's increasing affection took the form of increasing sweetmeats. The more her heart warmed towards Elias, the bigger she made her tarts. And it was not till she reached the limit of her largest pudding-mould that she found out how inconvenient is the limitlessness of the human soul.



He liked the tarts; no fear of his not liking them. For he was a bright boy with a healthy appetite, and nothing about him of those transcendental little wretches who are too good to succumb to a weakness for goodies. I am sorry to own I fear he was not at all particularly good. His stepmother was right in saying that there was no danger of his dying from premature development of wings. He did not want his wings to develop. He did not want to die. He was self-willed, and he always gave the preference to his own view of his own requirements, as older children are apt to do at times. And he had occasional fits of mischief, as when he put Tonnerre into the milk-pail, because someone had explained to him the other day that thunder had turned the milk. He soon began trying to bully Johanna, and sometimes he succeeded, and sometimes he didn't. He did not mope about his deafness, for, thank God! he did not fully realize it. And, with the insouciance of his age, he had forgotten all about the scare of his blindness. He did not think he was going to be blind. They had said it would be all right now the weakness kept away.

He sat, with Tonnerre asleep on his knees, and Johanna at work as usual, by his side, watching the hushed sunset of a beautiful autumn evening. Johanna was knitting a set of reins for him—crimson wool with tinkling bells; she had been busy over them for some time, and he watched her work with increasing interest.

"When you are ready, I shall be your horse," he said; "I am sure now I prefer being horse. I have made up my mind, because it is so nice to be able to run wherever one likes."

Johanna nodded back to him, and beamed all over her genial face. Then she said to him on her fingers—for she had learned to use these signs with extreme facility—that they would go for their long-planned excursion to the mountains on the other side as soon as the reins were ready—to-morrow, perhaps, or the day after, and he should lead

her all the time. He flushed up with pleasure, as he watched her nimble movements. "That will be splendid!" he answered—"splendid!" He loved sweetmeats, undoubtedly, but he loved sweet words far better, and those fond glances best of all.

The pale autumnal light was rapidly shadowing over, so rapidly that it seemed as if you could almost watch the folds of the mantle of night come falling one by one across the landscape. A moment ago the whole mountain-side had been one great mass of sunlit foliage, swept together in tumbled waves of crimson, and sheets of vari-coloured gold. The confusion of splendour was already gone; a wide smoothness of dull orange was deepening into indefinite gray. And the cold, still sky was shrouding itself in mist. The sun had sunk from sight behind the mountains, yonder, where his radiance still lay white. Elias sat looking intently on the spot where he had disappeared.

The nurse shuddered. The autumn air was cold, and earthy, wet with decay and approaching death.

"Let us go in," she said.

But Elias clung to her, and held her fast.

"Oh, it is beautiful!" he said—"beautiful! What a beautiful thing to see!"

She drew him into the house, and helped him to get into bed; and she sat watching him for many minutes after he had dropped fast asleep.

And the next morning, when Elias again opened his eyes, he found that God had left him nothing in the world for them to open on.

## CHAPTER VI.

### “THUNDER ”-STORMS.

No, it was not unexpected, or unusual, or unlikely. At least, not if we are to believe the doctors, for the news no sooner got about that little Elias Lossell was once more stricken with blindness, than all the medical authorities of Koopstad exclaimed that they had foreseen this catastrophe from the first. And the great specialist who had advised the journey to Clarens remarked what a good thing it was that they had followed his advice, or the blindness might have come on almost seven weeks sooner. Old Lossell hurried over to see what could be done for his unfortunate son. Nothing could be done.

It was not unexpected. At least, not to Johanna, who had watched, with that fatal perspicacity which only love bestows, for every sign of approaching danger. She could not deny to herself that of late Elias had been constantly troubled by his old enemy, the headache over the eyebrows; that he had complained of the restless flames and circles which would not let him sleep at night; that he had——

Ah me! that morning, a few days ago, when she had spelt out to him from her window, “Jasje, see the big balloon over the water!” and he had called back out of the garden, “There isn’t any balloon, Johanna—there isn’t any balloon at all.” How had she, in the phraseology of her own people, “held her heart fast,” lest it should drop from her!

These and many other instances I have passed over, not wishing to dwell upon what will be considered by many a

sad episode in the story of Elias ; anxious, above all, to avoid any semblance of a wish to "pile up the agony," as it is vulgarly called ; but I am conscious of few things with greater clearness than of the fact that Johanna, when she detailed her experiences to me in after-years, repeatedly assured me that she had seen the prophetic cloud lie heavy on Elias's brow for many weeks before it fell.

It fell. The woman sat by his bedside, the unfinished harness on her lap. From out his sudden darkness the child poured out question after question, appeal after appeal. He wanted help—medical help ; would they give it to him ? Was the doctor coming ? Had he been already, perhaps ? What had he said ? Would the blindness pass off as it had passed off last time ? Of course it would pass off—would it not ? would it not ?

No answer possible.

The woman got up hurriedly, and rushed from the room. She could no longer bear that ceaseless cry into the void. And, then, she could not bear to be away from it, beyond the reach of his requirements and his sorrows, and she came hurrying back again, and fell down by the bedside, and took his little hand and held it fast in both her own.

And she was almost glad that he could not see her tears.

Already, in that first anxiety of desolation, she taught him that the pressure of her hand meant "Yes."

After a moment or two he understood her. A look of passionate relief came over his face. The inexpressible horror of complete isolation died away from him—a horror of thirty minutes' duration, never to be forgotten—communication was re-established, imperfect, yet possible. He trembled over it, cried over it, clung to it, and in a sudden flash of inspiration he burst out :

"Stroke my hand, if you mean 'No,' Johanna. It won't remain, will it ? It will go off, as it did last time.

It can't remain. Oh, Johanna, why doesn't the doctor come?"

"Let him stay where he is for the present," said Mevrouw Lossell, arranging her teacups, and looking away from her husband; "it will be much better both for him and for the other children. You say that the woman is devoted to him, and she can give him her continual care. He is content to be with her, I presume?"

"More than content," said Hendrik Lossell bitterly.

She rattled her cups slightly, still without looking at him.

"I have always deeply regretted," she went on, "that your son has not met my advances with such confidence on his part as I believe them to have merited."

"The child!" burst out Lossell; "the poor, wretched, motherless child!"

"Not necessarily motherless," she answered coldly. "You need not insult me without reason, Hendrik. These recriminations are as unseemly as they are unavailing. But, in the interest of my own children, I must discharge a present duty, though I can afford to ignore the past. However painful the duty may be, I dare not shrink from it."

It is a thoroughly feminine trait to accuse an opponent of having started an argument which can no longer be profitably kept up.

"And what is your duty?" asked the merchant, with a palpable sneer.

"To suffer misrepresentation," she answered quickly. "Very well, I will endure it. And therefore I venture to say, Elias must not associate daily with his little brothers. The strain would be greater than children of their age could endure. And I cannot allow them to submit to it."

"Pooh!" said the merchant.

Judith was not a woman of half-measures.

"Brute!" she cried, turning on her husband. "Choose between my children and your own."

The phrase, inspired by jealousy, was an unfortunate one. She felt this, even as she uttered it.

"Mevrouw," said Lossell stiffly, "you forget yourself. Or rather, Judith, you are a fool. Mind this, it is neither your interest, nor that of your children, to estrange Elias. Some day, perhaps, you will be glad enough, both you *and* your children, to live in his house, and to eat of his bread. Good-night"—and he walked out of the room with the happy consciousness of having gained the victory at least once in his life.

Some things are praised for their sweetness, and some for their rarity. A husband's triumphs belong to the latter, not to the former, class.

He was resolved not to leave the boy alone in a foreign country. He fetched him back without another word of excuse or explanation. But he did not immediately bring him home. "Elias shall decide for himself," he said. "He shall do what he likes best." But how to make him understand? There lay the difficulty; for the poor little patient had sunk into a state of apathy. He was rapidly losing his touch, such as it was, of the outer world. Walled in on every side, he began to succumb to the hopelessness of trying to look out. His eager questioning—at first a very torrent of anxious entreaty—was dwindling into one ceaselessly-repeated, unanswerable, "When will the doctor make me see again?" Those about him grew to yearn for the stream of appeals they had formerly dreaded as they watched him sitting silent, mournful, hour after hour, with only the reiterated interruption of that slowly-decreasing hope. And then even that restless flicker sank low, and for long periods he would not speak at all.

A few days after the catastrophe, Johanna suddenly snatched up her unfinished harness, and began vehemently



knitting at it. She had been struck by the thought that though Elias could no longer lead the way as horse, he might still act the part of coachman. In this manner she would perhaps succeed in rousing him to a little exercise; for as yet he shrank back from all contact with the outer world, and would creep brooding into a corner when they came to fetch him for a walk. He tore off the cap he felt placed on his head, and cried out that he would wear no more caps till the doctor made him see again. Johanna came to him, having finished the work in a hurry, and put the ends of the reins in his hands. She had removed the bells which she had first added at his express desire. He had been very particular about those bells. "For though I don't hear them, I can see they are where they ought to be," he had repeatedly said. Now she cut them off with a weary sigh. "He will prefer to know they are no longer there," she said to herself. But she was mistaken. She was often mistaken at first; and it took even her yearning affection some time to find out the idiosyncrasies of a peculiar case like Elias's. Hendrik Lossell noticed this. He noticed many things in those days of indecision, anxious, waiting, longing to do the best for the afflicted child who persisted in living on, to his own detriment and that of them all. "It wants a lot of love," said the loveless father to himself, with a pang of self-reproach. He thought of his smooth, self-satisfied wife, and of chubby, happy Henkie and Hubbie. How could he bring yonder wreck among them? And yet how dare he thrust from the door of his house its rightful lord?

Yes; let there be no secrets. Secrets are only clumsy aids to interest, and this story shall carefully avoid them. It does not require them, for it is a true story. Hendrik Lossell might be a great merchant, but wretched little Elias was the only rich member of the family.

When Johanna brought him the harness, he immediately felt for the bells, and an expression of pain came over his face.

He realized why she had removed them; and a little querulously he bade her put them back. And so this rough peasant woman also learnt, step by step, her lesson of devotion—the devotion of her life. She was barely thirty when she returned to her post as Elias's nurse. She never deserted him afterwards.

The lad allowed her to persuade him, by caresses, to creep out into the open air with her. But the reins were a failure; for he stumbled forward in his darkness and his uncertainty, and fell and cut his face. And again Johanna had to make a discovery—that the blind must learn to walk anew.

Tonnerre, also, had to learn the lesson that his friend could run no more. To him it was an enigma, and he puzzled over it with many growls. At last he gave it up, and adapted himself to circumstances, which had been altered without his consent. He rolled away within easy reach on the floor; and, actually, Elias felt after him. And then he rolled on a little bit farther, and again a little bit; and Elias rolled in the same direction, and grabbed at his tail as he whisked it up and down. And then Elias actually laughed.

It was for the first time in several days, ever since his seizure. Johanna threw her apron to her face, and once more fled from the room. It was such a bright little laugh.

She need not have fled from those sightless eyes. Undoubtedly. But one of the last things for her to realize was the fact that, if Elias was unable to see anything, he could not see her.

Parting from Madame Juberton meant parting from Madame Juberton's dog. And here a serious difficulty arose. Neither his father nor Johanna dared inflict new pain upon the sufferer. Yet neither, seeing the affection the lonely old widow lavished upon her only companion,

dared at first suggest a separation between them. Already Elias had asked once or twice what was to become of Tonnerre. But it was impossible as yet to make him understand other signs than “Yes” and “No.” He knew it, and would soon abandon all hope of an answer, only repeating his question from time to time lest they should forget it. And once he had suggested timidly that perhaps papa might buy the dog. He had always been a child of great delicacy of feeling, and he evidently shrank from the thought of Madame Juberton’s loss, while unable to bear the prospect of his own. “No,” he said, after a moment, as if arguing out the matter with himself. “Papa can not buy Tonnerre from Madame Juberton.” And he sighed.

Papa, however, resolved to think differently about the matter. He went to the landlady, and offered her twenty-five francs for her favourite. The old lady sat up in her chair.

“No, monsieur,” she said; “I cannot sell Tonnerre. I love your unfortunate little son, but Tonnerre is the only friend I have in the world.”

Two pink spots spread out under her ears. But Hendrik Lossell was not in the habit of noticing such signs as these. They had no connection with business.

“I will give you fifty,” he said, and then—as she continued to stare at him in silence—“well, madam, I will make it a hundred, and that is the very last price I can offer. It is six times his value; but I am grateful for your kindness to Elias, and the child is attached to the little animal. You cannot in reason, madam, do otherwise than admit that I am paying an utterly disproportionate sum for him.”

“The price of the dog, Monsieur the Town Councillor,” said Madame Juberton in a great flutter, “is three hundred thousand francs.”

She made him a very low curtsey, and disappeared from his sight.

Yet the merchant was not to blame—not from his point of view. His offer had been as noble a conquest of self as a Dutch man of business could achieve. To deliberately offer for anything on earth—ay, or in heaven—what he believed to be twice its value—four times its value—six times its value—he would rather have had any number of his teeth extracted, like that Israelite of the good old Plantagenet times. He trod his most sacred convictions under foot for the child's sake—never mind whether the sum be little or large—and having slaughtered his commercial self-respect on the altar of paternal affection, he was left standing gazing blankly at the faded pattern of an empty chair, while the growls of the insulted quadruped oozed towards him under the bedroom door.

Madame Juberton was peeping through the keyhole, and waiting for him to go.

There was no more talk after that of buying Tonnerre. Elias sent for him constantly now, as if he would make up for the approaching separation, and he sat silent in a corner for hours with the rough-haired bundle in his lap. It was only during their brief frolics on the floor that he seemed to wake to any consciousness of enjoyment, and even then he would very soon desist with a “Papa, when is the doctor coming again? Does he think I am better, papa?”

Madame Juberton would stand watching the playmates. She said nothing. Only once, when Hendrik Lossell caught her in the act, she broke out sharply:

“I do not approve myself, monsieur, of letting children play too much with dogs.”

“I do not think,” the merchant had retorted, “that this child plays too much.”

Madame repeated those words several times to herself in the course of the day. As often as she did so, she carefully took off her spectacles, and wiped them, and put them on again. And she gave Tonnerre a lump of sugar. That

lump of sugar came upon him as an unpredicted eclipse might come upon an astronomer. It reduced all his calculations to immediate chaos. For he only got lumps of sugar on Sundays, and he never had been out in his reckoning yet. Perhaps he thought that the Comtist calendar had been introduced, or that Madame Juberton had altered her religion.

The day of departure arrived. With many grumbings, and a few tears, Madame Juberton prepared the farewell meal for her guests, as well as a provision of cakes and sweetmeats for Elias's special delectation on the road. The dear child must eat, she said, if they hoped to keep up his strength. And *there* was the difficulty. For the child said, "I *will* eat," and then left his plate almost untouched.

As they sat, equipped for their journey, the remnants of their meal on the table, Madame Juberton hurried in, bringing with her the final *chef d'œuvre* of her dessert—an enormous *pâté*—which crowned with its majestic dome of delicate crust the largest pie-dish in her pantry. It was her farewell "goodie" for Elias, the last of a stately line, but the last.

She put it down in front of him, and placed his hand upon it. And when he had realized what it was, exclaiming, "Oh, what a big *pâté*. I never can eat it all, madame!" she pressed down his fingers, down through the crashing pie-crust, into something soft, and slippery, and woolly. Something that snapped at those fingers and then licked them. I don't think the something bit them. I fancy it understood.

Madame Juberton has never taken another dog.

## CHAPTER VII.

### STEPMOTHERS.

“AND now what next?” It was the question which Hendrik Lossell kept repeatedly putting to himself as he sat opposite the child in the train. He found it difficult to look at that miserable face without a sensation of petulant disgust. However ashamed he might be of the thought, he could not entirely suppress a feeling of anger towards the child for being what he was.

“It is not his fault,” he said to himself a hundred times over; “but——”

He hesitated. The expression itself, “it is not his fault,” struck him in the face with a momentary tingle of self-reproach.

Elias must decide for himself whether he would rather return home or remain with Johanna. In the latter case a little cottage would be prepared for him at a short distance from his father’s house. But what did he himself prefer?

“Are we going back to mamma?” he had asked once—only once.

His father had indicated to him that this was the case. No expression of feeling, whether pleasant or painful, had been called to his face by the news.

Yet Lossell had noticed that the child’s countenance was capable of expressing many changes of emotion. And, most remarkable of all, it had soon become evident that Elias distinguished the touch of some persons whenever or wherever they touched him. This faculty had developed



itself extraordinarily in the first weeks of his blindness; but he had always, ever since he had lost his hearing, manifested an extreme delicacy of nervous perception. If Johanna, for instance, stole behind him and laid her hand on his shoulder, his face would instantly light up with a glad smile of recognition. He recognized the touch of her hand among all others, even without lifting his own to feel it. They tried in vain to mystify him on the subject. The only result was that he got to know Madame Juberton also, to that worthy lady's inexpressible delight.

Elias said little on the journey. Only now and then he ejaculated "Tonnerre," and the accent with which he spoke the word would have amply rewarded the widow could she have heard it. He had been very angry because they wanted him to travel with a green shade—a useless precaution of the Geneva oculist's—and he had torn it off and kicked it from him. But later on he had meekly resumed it, for his father had not had the courage to disappoint him when he asked whether it would do his eyes good and make them see sooner than otherwise.

As they neared their destination Elias seemed to awake from his apathy, and began to manifest signs of agitation. He crept closer to Johanna, and nestled up against her, and then, unexpectedly, and with an evident effort, he asked whether Johanna was going to stay.

The maid looked quickly towards her master, the same question palpitating into her own cheeks with a flush of burning appeal. How often had she longed to receive a response to this demand of her heart! Hendrik Lossell could hesitate no longer. He signed to the nurse to press her charge's hand.

"Of course," said Elias quietly, "I could not do without you, Johanna, as long as I am like this. And when I can see again, I shall come and visit you very often, as often as I may."

The woman could only press his hand again, and cast

grateful glances towards the merchant. The naïve, childish egotism did not hurt her ; it was only natural.

"That binds me to one condition in any case," thought the father. "Wherever the boy remains, this woman must remain with him. But in the meantime, and as long as he himself makes no difficulties, I must take him home, whether Judith likes it or not."

Judith did not like it. Of that there could be no doubt. And surely it was impossible altogether to disagree with her when she said that the two healthy, noisy children and their deaf and blind half-brother were not fitting companions for each other. She stood in the hall with the martyred air of a woman who is resolved to have her own way.

A female servant helped Elias to alight. "Is it mamma?" he asked, as he took the outstretched hand.

The woman pressed his fingers, and he, mistaking this pressure for the sign of affirmation to which he had now become so accustomed, put up his face to be kissed. The maid stooped down and kissed him—almost involuntarily.

"Jans!" cried Mevrouw Lossell, in stern indignation, from the top of the steps. The housemaid started and blushed. "Bring the young Heer to me," commanded her mistress.

And Jans carefully guided the boy to his stepmother, whose outstretched hand he took indifferently, thinking she was one of the servants, and never dreaming of putting up his cheek again.

"Poor child!" said Mevrouw, not without some genuine pity at the actual sight of her stepson. "He has become completely idiotic already. I know Pillenaar always feared it would end like that."

"Where are Henkie and Hubbie?" queried Elias, turning his sightless eyes as if he would look for them in the hall.

"Not so idiotic, after all," thought his stepmother quickly. "He does not ask after me because he does not

care to know. His physical condition is very sad, very sad indeed. But he never had an amiable character, and it has been altogether warped by his infirmities."

Judith Lossell did not wish to be unkind to her step-child. Nor was she unkind to him. She treated him with exemplary forbearance. She kissed him cheerfully, when kissing was unavoidable. His clothes and his toys were quite as good as Henkie's and Hubbie's. Only she did not love him, that was all.

Do not let us be unjust. There is no law why step-mothers should love their husbands' children. On the contrary, there exists every reason for them not to do so. If they have no children of their own, they are jealous of the dead woman in her grave, and if they have children of their own, they want the living father to admire their children most. If the father doesn't, then jealousy of the first wife naturally steps in again.

There is no reason, if you come to think of that, why anybody should love anybody else, and, as a rule, they don't, unless the other person is a bit of themselves, either by choice, in the shape of passion, or by fate, in the shape of birth. And this intense egotism of the human race explains the frantic admiration of our own offspring which goes by the name of "a mother's love," and which never by any chance extends to anybody else's progeny. Why doesn't somebody feel a mother's love for somebody else's motherless babe?

No, there is every reason, on the contrary, why we should dislike each other as soon as we begin to argue about it. For in all of us the disagreeable largely predominates over the agreeable side. I know it does in me, because I have frequently been assured of the fact. And if you are not as certain of the matter in your case, that merely proves, not that you are more agreeable than I am, but that my friends are more disagreeable than yours. More truthful, if you like, but I sha'n't scratch out my word be-

cause you prefer a synonym. I don't know your friends, still, I have no reason to doubt the possibility of their being more amiable than mine.

If, then, the disagreeable predominates, we dislike people as soon as we begin to argue about them. Fortunately, we rarely take the trouble to think our friends out, and that accounts for our retaining them. But this, nevertheless, is the whole solution of the stepmother question. A stepmother is always arguing about her stepchildren's right and wrong. She never argues about her own children.

If she is a good woman, she will do all she can to persuade herself that she is harsh. And the very effort will make all the blemishes stand out more.

I heard a good soul say the other day that a friend of hers must be fond of her stepchildren, because she was so very kind to them—kinder frequently than to her own. As if she would have been so very kind to them if she had loved them! As if any mother was ever kind to her own children! There are plenty of unkind mothers, mind you; but there never yet was a mother who was "kind."

There was a lady once who said to her little daughter, as they came out of the pastrycook's:

"Give that remnant of tart to you poor little girl, darling! you have had more than is good for you already, and you know, besides, that you don't care much for this sort."

"Thank you, kind lady!" said the street-girl, as she seized on the cake. And she was right—that lady was "kind."

There is another wide field which lies next to this one of the world's stepmothers, a far wider field, whose sterility can be demonstrated in the same manner; it belongs to the world's mothers-in-law. We have to do here with another form of the very identical disease, but we are not going to speak of it, because that would lead to digressions, and digressions are excrescences, and excrescences are faults.

A digression already! Nay, this has been anything but

a digression—it is of the very essence of the character of Judith Lossell and her relation to the hero of the tale.

Yet it is an awful thought—one word only; forgive it—it is a thought which must trouble many a thinking man as he lies upon his bed through the long hours of the night—that, while but few people are troubled with stepchildren, almost everyone possesses—or is possessed by—a mother-in-law.

For shame! this is cynical talk which leaves no one the better for its utterance—except, perhaps, the cynic. But if that be true, it is an impertinence here. And therefore peccavi. If the fire will but cease smoking, and the tea-kettle commence singing, if that rat-tat at the front-door will but bring me—not a bill I thought I had paid, as the last one did—but a letter, let us say, from the dear old mother at home—*my* mother—I don't care tuppence about anybody else's—we shall have no more cynical talk.

Judith Lossell was very kind to Elias, all the kinder because she was resolved to remove him from the family circle, and “place him under proper care.”

Oh, by-the-bye, dear stepmother, whoever you are, who read this, don't write to me to say that *you* have always loved *your* stepchildren as much as your own. I know you have. I didn't mean you.

But, despite all the efforts to make him comfortable, Elias was not happy at home. They could not procure him happiness—that was natural—but they could not even spare him those additional annoyances which he had not felt while abroad. On the evening of his arrival, after he had repeatedly asked for them, the twins were brought to him half asleep.

“I disapprove of it,” said Judith sharply—“I disapprove of it altogether. The children are just going to bed. This

is not the moment to frighten them, Hendrik, and cause, perhaps, a lasting estrangement."

"If he asks for them, he must have them," replied the Town Councillor shortly. And he stepped across the room and rang the bell.

The issue proved Mevrouw Lossell right. Henkie and Hubbie, called down at so unusual a moment, shrank away from the still figure sitting unconscious in the shade. They hung back—fortunately, he could not see that—and then, as their father forcibly pushed them forward, they shrieked out in abject terror—fortunately, he could not hear that.

"I will not have it, Hendrik," cried Mevrouw Lossell, starting up with indignant eyes. Her husband hesitated.

"And the boys? When are they coming to see me?" asked Elias again, speaking out into the void, as was his habit—what else could he do? That question, suddenly issuing from the living tomb before them, even as they were unwillingly drawing nearer to it, completely upset the two children. They broke loose from their father, and fled to their mother for protection, screaming to be taken away. And she drew them towards her and out of the room, leaving Hendrik Lossell standing undecided, staring stupidly at the wreck of his eldest son.

Elias, though unable to realize this and similar scenes, soon began to understand that his little brothers did not care to play with him, and that they did not come when he called. It was a great trouble to him, but he retreated into his solitude with all the sensitiveness of disease. He shared that solitude with Johanna and Tonnerre. The last-mentioned personage, unfortunately, had merited disgrace by his aggressive behaviour towards Mevrouw Lossell's fluffy lapdog. He had growled at the lapdog, and when the lapdog growled back, he had flown at him. Elias, alone in the room with them, had remained entirely unconscious of the catastrophe. And his stepmother, descending suddenly upon the combatants, had beaten Tonnerre. Of this also



Elias knew nothing, but he soon found out that his friend was not happy except with him.

Johanna, of course, was impudent. This any one could have foreseen. It was inevitable that mistress and maid should disagree about Elias and his wants, and, as Johanna was a "menial," and Judith a "Mevrouw," there could not be the slightest doubt that the former would be "impudent" or would in any case, find herself designated as such.

So Johanna and Elias and Tonnerre soon got to spend their days together in a big room at the top of the house which had been set aside for their use. There was not much opportunity for out-door life now, for when the year is dying at Clarens it has been dead for some time in Holland, where, in fact, its health has never been very robust. And Elias refused, even more vehemently than before, to go out into the streets, now he was back in a place where everybody knew him. He would creep down the garden-path occasionally—"foot by foot," as they say in Holland—leaning on his nurse's arm. But, for the most part, he sat upstairs, immovable, and waited for the doctor.

And the doctor came, and looked very learned, and examined his eyes, and felt his pulse.

"It is the brain," said the doctor. "It is the brain."

The sentence was not a long one, but it only cost half-a-crown, for doctors are not expensive in Holland, as a rule.

"And, Johanna, when does he think I shall see again?" asked Elias. "Next week?"

Constantly, Johanna found herself placed between silence and a lie.

"I shall tell him," she said, "some day. Soon. I cannot agree with his father. Surely it is much better he should know."

"When he knows, he knows forever," said Hendrik Lossell.

The merchant grew daily more tender-hearted towards

his child under the influence of the spectacle of the servant-maid's love.

"It brings her in two hundred and fifty florins and her keep," he said to himself. "And what a lot she supplies for the money! It is a cheap thing, is love!"

Ah, indeed, dear merchant, it is a cheap thing, is love—the cheapest thing on earth—and the one we pay most dearly for, when the final reckoning comes.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### COUSIN COCOA.

AND then Mevrouw Lossell's cousin came to see Elias, the chocolate-manufacturess. She was very self-confident and important, was this lady, and that seems only natural, for her husband's chocolate was the very best in the world, as is the chocolate of everybody who manufactures chocolate at all. Chocolate and cocoa are just like sweethearts. Each is better than all the others. In fact, there is no better; there is only everybody's individual best.

Mevrouw Lossell did not fully appreciate Mevrouw van Bussen's sterling qualities. For Mevrouw van Bussen's great merit consisted in knowing better than all her neighbours what was good for them and their children, and this admirable characteristic Mevrouw Lossell had never succeeded in finding out. Yet Mevrouw Lossell's obtuseness in no way diminished Mevrouw van Bussen's ardour. The latter lady, in fact, only pulled all the more energetically in the right direction, the more she saw infatuated beings turn towards the wrong one.

"There's none so blind as those that won't see," she said, when they carried off Elias to Clarens.

And she also said it when they brought him back again. She meant Elias's stepmother, not Elias.

"I shall go and call on Judith Lossell this afternoon," said this good lady to her husband at breakfast. "There are a hundred other things I ought to do, undoubtedly, but I shall leave them all and go and call on Judith Lossell."

"I should do what I ought to," remarked her husband quietly.

He was a very worthy man. He had never looked farther than the tip of his own nose; and it was a short one.

"I mean 'ought to,' if I consulted my own convenience," retorted Mevrouw van Bussen; "but I rarely find occasion to do that."

"Can't always neglect it," said the chocolate-maker, with his mouth full.

"If you mean to insinuate, Titus, that I do not look after my own household," flashed out his wife, "I can only advise you to go and stay for three days with the Lossells. I only advise you to. And she with her two children and a half to my ten!"

"Why should I go and stay with them when we live in the same town, Amelia?" asked Titus. "I wish you would give me some more tea. And, if you are going, you might take Elias a box of chocolates. I'll send you one up from the office."

"Never!" cried Mevrouw, energetically pouring out the tea. "That woman would say—behind my back—that I had poisoned the child. I know she sent for a tin of Van Houten's cocoa the other day from the grocer's. I know she did, for my sister Waalwyk's cook heard it from the Overest's servant, who was in the shop at the time."

"Never mind," said Van Bussen good-naturedly. "Ours is the best. Van Houten is well enough when you can't get ours."

By-the-bye, a strange misfortune befell our good friend Van Bussen the other day. He had paid the Koopstad Tramcar company a swinging price to have boards put up outside all their trams with "Van Bussen's Cocoa is the best" in enormous letters. And when the contract had been signed and sealed, and made hard and fast for a twelve-month, there came his hated Rotterdam rival, and he paid

the company a still swinginger price to have *his* boards put up just under the other man's. And on these boards was written in yet more enormous letters: "When you can't get Van Swink's."

The company's shareholders now all drink Vau Swink's concoction. He says in his advertisements that his cocoa is 'grateful.' It is difficult to say what that may mean, but it is certain that the shareholders are.

"I shall not make any allusion to her unthankfulness," said Mevrouw van Bussen to herself, as she marched off to her cousin's. She was alluding to Judith Lossell's purchase of the rival brand; "I should consider it beneath me to do so. And it's her loss, not mine, if she ruins her children's healths. On my part, I will do what I can for them. 'Strive to do good, and you'll learn to do better,' as the Dominé said so beautifully last Sabbath. But Judith doesn't even strive. I wish Titus would go to church with me more regularly. He says it interferes with his Sunday rest. And yet it needn't do that."

Her thin lips pinched themselves together into a contortion which no one but a connoisseur in facial expression would have understood to be a smile, as there rose up before her mental vision that long line of reposeful faces which nodded down at her for a couple of hours every Sunday from the pews where the gentlemen of Koopstad sat enthroned—such of them as went to church. Male Hollanders seldom do, for the service consists almost entirely of sermon, and they probably get enough of that at home in the week.

"Well, how do you do, Elias?" said 'Cousin Cocoa,' as the little Lossells called her. She had just been ushered into the room where the child sat alone with his dog. In spite of all her cleverness, Mevrouw van Bussen constantly forgot either the boy's deafness or his blindness in her occa-

sional intercourse with him. Now, however, in the unaltered silence, she realized, and blushed over, her mistake. She was one of those people who are so convinced of their own superiority that, to appear foolish, even to themselves, for ever so brief a moment, is absolute suffering to them. Fortunately, with this kind of people, the moment is always very brief indeed, and it leaves no scar.

She stood hesitating near the door. There was a strange dog on Elias's lap, and this creature, a bundle of odds and ends of brown untidiness, sat up and growled at her. *Mevrouw van Bussen* had nerves of iron; it was something else in her then—her calves, perhaps—that lived in constant terror of little dogs. We are all of us afraid of something—even the bravest—afraid of either of these two: the indefinitely great, or the infinitesimally small.

“Who is there?” said Elias. “Come and feel my hand, please.”

He could always perceive the entry of some one into the room—the opening and shutting of a door, or any other sudden displacement of air being felt by him, though he could not hear it.

*Mevrouw van Bussen* shrank back before *Tonnerre's* redoubled growls, and Elias vainly repeated his question. Then, suddenly frightened by the unexpected continuance of silence, smitten by one of those panics which complete helplessness is apt to produce, he started from his chair, crying out:

“To the rescue! Danger! Thieves!” and fell over a footstool in his haste to get away, bringing down with him in his fall a column with a favorite statuette of his step-mother's. *Tonnerre* flew straight at *Mevrouw van Bussen*, who, skipping back all too rapidly, with her skirts drawn tightly round her, sat down suddenly in a bowl of flowers.

Upon this confusion entered *Judith Lossell*, as placid as concealed vexation can manage to be—terribly placid.

“Yes; the child's condition is a great affliction,” she said



smoothly, as she helped up her dripping cousin out of the pool of water and broken glass. "I am sorry you could not help frightening him, as you say, for that flower-basket was given me by my sister who is dead, and the statuette had been my mother's, as you may remember. Not that it matters; only, of course, one gets attached to these things. Oh no, I should not say your mantle was *entirely* spoiled, not if you take out the stained part, and put in another piece, although I fear you will not be able to match the colour exactly—it is such a—a—*peculiar* colour. Be quiet, do!"—here she turned fiercely on Tonnerre, who had never left off barking—"that miserable animal is the worry of my life. Oh yes; he certainly bites!—he nearly killed my poor little "Fox"—never mind; I can't help it. I don't fancy he will bite you, Amelia, but if he does, you must bear it."

"Judith!" cried Amelia, in disgust and admiration. She was whisking round and round in futile efforts to get a full view of the damage to her mantle, and Tonnerre, who believed she was attempting to amuse him, was whisking after her in jumps and snaps. She stopped suddenly.

"My dear, I cannot help it. I am not the master of the house," rejoined Judith, more placidly still. She had picked up Elias, and was doing her best to reassure him by kisses and caresses. This was her duty, and she fulfilled it in the most exemplary manner. Even after he had settled down again contentedly on the sofa, she gave him two more kisses than her duty required. These, therefore, were supererogatory, and doubtless were written down as such.

Not till Tonnerre had been turned into—and a cane-bottomed chair had been fetched out of—the hall (for not even the removal of the mantle had rendered this latter precaution superfluous) did Mevrouw van Bussen resume her efforts to enter into communication with little Elias. Then, over however, she sat down by his side, and guided his hand her face.

Mevrouw van Bussen had the bulbousest of bulbous

noses. As soon as the blind child's hand reached it, he exclaimed in accents partly of vexation and partly of amusement:

"Why, it's only Cousin Cocoa, mamma!"

The reaction from the alarm he had just experienced threw him completely off his guard.

The chocolate-makeress appreciated neither the contentment of the "only," nor the humour of the nickname thus suddenly flung in her face. She was smarting with the humiliation of her cousin's broken crockery, and she sprang delightedly at the retaliation of a grievance of her own. She let go little Elias's hand.

"I am sorry to perceive, Judith," she said, bristling up, "that you encourage your children to speak disrespectfully of me. I have always considered such matters from a very different point of view. When my children began to speak of Elias here as 'Deafy,' I put it down at once with a high hand, though he could not even hear it, and I whipped one of the boys, with great pain (to myself), when he disobeyed me. I see now that I might have spared my wrath; not that I wish to do evil lest good should come, but it is evident that you do not consider it necessary to punish your children for the faults of mine, or rather, I mean, that what is a punishment for my children should be a fault in yours. I mean that the faults of my punishment——"

"Exactly," said Judith, in her clearest voice.

Mevrouw van Bussen preferred to scramble out of her muddle as quickly as possible.

"And even this afternoon," she went on excitedly, "I came here, only actuated by the sincerest interest in that child's welfare, though I am no cousin of his, whether Cocoa or otherwise! I had better go, Judith, since I am an object of derision and a source of amusement. Do not, pray, think I am vexed with Elias; I pity him far too much for that, but I certainly am of opinion that your children——"

"Of course, if you wish to go, I shall not detain you," interrupted Mevrouw Lossell, as her visitor rose while speaking, "but I should advise you to consider the desirability of waiting till your dress is dried. The stain shows, you know—ahem—when you get up."

Mevrouw van Bussen sat down again with great rapidity, and said :

"I cannot understand, my dear cousin, why you have never tried the experiment of treating Elias's case homœopathically."

"You remember, dear cousin," replied Judith, "that I experimented on Henkie's chilblains homœopathically at your request. I gave the child sips of *vox populi* and *belladonna* alternately every half hour for a week, and somebody was always upsetting the tumblers with their paper covers, and making messes all over the room."

Mevrouw Lossell's eyes wandered, perhaps involuntarily, to the stain on the carpet.

"Not '*vox populi*,' '*nux vomica*,'" said Mevrouw van Bussen, with a great air of superiority. "Besides, the chilblains got better."

"Yes, when the warm weather came round; but we had left off the medicines long before that."

"After all, the homœopathic system is the only rational one," said the chocolate-makeress, again branching off to smoother ground. "'*Simile syllabubs*,' as my doctor always says, which, you know, means 'cure like with like.' Now, the reasonableness of that must strike everyone immediately. It 'jumps to the eyes.'"

"Why?" asked Judith.

"Oh, because—because—— Of course, it is a law of nature, like gravitation, and all that, you know! And I think—not that I wish to give you any advice on the matter—that the system might well be tried on Elias."

"I can't make him blinder," said Mevrouw Lossell, with a half-suppressed yawn. "You could only put it into prac-

tice on a one-eyed person. Elias hasn't got any eyes left to put out, poor boy!"

"You willfully misapprehend me, Judith. You ought to give him phosphorus for his brain, and aconite for his—well, at any rate, certainly aconite."

"Oh, undoubtedly aconite!" said Judith.

"It is your business, after all, and not mine, if the child gets better. Not but that I would do anything in my power, anything—for I have ten children of my own—only I am afraid of appearing to meddle. I have spoken to my homœopathic doctor about the case, but he refuses to give an opinion until he has seen the patient. So I thought you might perhaps step down to his house with Elias one of these days. His hours are from one to three."

"Thank you," replied Mevrouw Lossell negligently. "I will put him down on my list. I shall hardly be able to get to him this week, because I already have nine physicians, previously recommended, and a magnetism-man and a somnambulist, not to speak of Holloway's pills, and a family ointment. But as soon as your man's turn comes round, I shall give Elias his dose of aconite. Do you think I might give it him before the doctor says he is to have it, or do you deem it absolutely necessary to wait till after?"

"Judith," replied Mevrouw van Bussen, "I will trouble you to ask your man to get me a cab. When you feel sorry, you had better come and tell me so."

"I feel sorry already," said Judith—"very sorry." And again her eyes wandered towards the dark stain on the floor.

"I know all about your goings on, Judith," continued Amelia, again making for the door. "If you think Elias's health will improve upon inaction and Van Houten's cocoa, you will find out your mistake when it is too late."

"I know," said Judith, "Van Bussen's is the best."

## CHAPTER IX.

### ELIAS HEARS—THE TRUTH.

“MAMMA,” said Elias presently, from his corner in the great old-fashioned horse-hair sofa; “Mamma, do you know I feel sure Cousin Cocoa was cross because I called her Cousin Cocoa. I didn’t mean to, but I was so surprised, I quite forgot. I’m very sorry. I should have liked to tell her so, only I didn’t dare.”

From her seat by the window, Mevrouw Lossell looked round at the child without moving. She was vexed with him for tumbling about and breaking things. To tell the truth, he had already occasioned several of these smashes, for his blindness was too recent as yet not to betray him from time to time. “I do my best,” he said, “but somehow the things get out of their distances.”

Mevrouw Lossell was in a very bad temper, not with him so much as with fate, and with Mevrouw van Bussen. She was very cruelly used, she thought, in being saddled with this dead weight. Of course she was sorry for the child. She was extremely sorry. But did that, she asked her husband a dozen times over, forbid her being sorry for herself? When a man is egotistical, he sometimes feels ashamed of it. When a woman is egotistical, she never even notices that she is.

But the disease is much rarer in females, especially under a certain age.

“Yes, I wish I could have told her,” continued Elias; “and, mamma, I am very sorry I broke the vase.”

“He is a good child,” soliloquized Mevrouw Lossell,

"and he deserves to be happier than we can make him here. I shall tell Hendrik so once more to-night. I found him crying again yesterday, because the children wouldn't play with him. They *can't* play with him! How can he play, I should like to know? It is very sad for us all; but surely common sense tells everyone but Hendrik that the boy will be better off outside the house."

In the meantime Elias went on speaking, partly to himself.

"I knew she was angry, because I can feel it," he said. "I feel it somehow, when people are very cross with me, or when they are very good to me. Only, sometimes, I make mistakes. Sometimes, for instance, I fancy you are cross with me, when I know I haven't done anything wrong, and then you come and kiss me, and so you see it's all an idea of mine. I don't like to think people are cross with me, when they're not, mamma; and I suppose it's very naughty."

Judith Lossell went over and kissed her stepson. The colour had deepened upon her substantial face.

"It's nice that I can speak to people," said Elias, with a weary sigh, "but, what's the use, when nobody can ever speak to me? I want somebody to speak to me very badly. Nobody has said anything for ever so long."

It was a yearning to which he had given utterance again and again, but this time the words were barely out of his mouth when he started up, his pale cheeks aglow with excitement, his whole frame trembling with the anxiety of the idea that possessed him.

"I must go upstairs to Johanna," he stuttered. "Please, please open the door, mamma. I can quite well find my way if you will let me out. I have got something to ask her immediately. No; I can't wait till she comes to fetch me. Oh, mamma, do you know I think I might—— Please, please let me out. Yes; I have got the balustrade. No, I sha'n't——"



He was gone.

He fell up the stairs in his haste, crying "Johanna! Johanna!" through the house, and as she ran out on to the landing to meet him, he threw himself, gasping for breath, into her arms.

"Quick!" he cried; "make A against my cheek, Johanna. A with your fingers. A, B, C. Yes, yes. Quick! put your hand so, up against my face. A, B, C. Not so fast. How stupid you are! D. D now; D, E. Oh, Johanna! I can hear everything you say. I can hear quite well like that. Go on; say something. Quick! quick! Oh, Johanna! I am sure I can hear like that."

He burst into tears, but still he held up his sightless face, with the big drops coursing down it, and pressed her hand against his cheek. And she, in the agitation of the moment, could think of nothing to say but "stockings," and "stockings" she said, gazing steadfastly down at the unfinished one lying in her lap.

"K," cried Elias, spelling out the Dutch word as she slowly formed the letters, laying her hands against his cheek—"K—O—U—— Not so fast. Do it over again. U—S. You said 'stockings,' Johanna. What made you say 'stockings'?"

He broke away from her, dancing round the table as best he could, and crying:

"Stockings; what made you say stockings? But I understood it quite well. I shall be able to hear them."

He fell up against something in his triumphant dancing, and tumbled back into Johanna's arms, sobbing as if his heart would break.

"Tell me quick," he sobbed, "why you said stockings. What made you say it, Johanna?"

It was the first word except "Yes" and "No" he had heard for several weeks.

The woman could only spell back to him "Nothing." Elias understood her.

"Stockings? nothing?" He grew impatient. "What do you mean, Johanna? Why can't you say something to me? I want dreadfully to hear you say something to me. Oh, Johanna, how unkind you are!"

She folded him to her breast for only answer, and it was not till several minutes later that she began more calmly to practice with Elias this spelling of the deaf and dumb alphabet where he could feel, instead of seeing it. Presently she selected the side of his neck in preference to his cheek, and this communication once being established, she soon agreed with him upon slight alterations and simplifications better suited to these peculiar circumstances. That, however, was the result of later considerations, when Elias had already got to understand whatever was said to him. It was not long before anyone who took the trouble to master these signs could converse with the boy, and soon he read them far quicker than they were given. And thus one great cloud rolled away from his darkness, and the stars came out again in the night.

"And, Johanna," he said, when the first tremor of discovery was over, and he sat enjoying, as it can but rarely be enjoyed, the full delight of question and answer, "now tell me all the doctor says about my eyes. It is that I have been wanting to know most of all during the whole long time. And nobody ever told me—not really. Of course, he says I shall get better. But does he think it will be soon? Does he think they are better already?"

"No, dear, you are not better," Johanna spelled back in return, with shaking fingers. "You must not think too much about getting better, Elias."

## CHAPTER X.

### DR. PILLENAAR'S REVENGE.

FOR the next fifteen years Elias Lossell lived with Johanna and a middle-aged under-servant in a little cottage outside the town, where his father came and saw him daily. His stepmother came often—not daily—and his brothers came also, from time to time. The under-servant changed once or twice as the years passed on; Johanna, of course, remained, and the flow of Elias's life was almost as a low-land stream under an overhanging willow.

It had been decided that he should go and live thus not long after intercourse had been re-established between him and the outside world. Judith Lossell believed to her dying day (she is dead; she died some years before the great catastrophe) that this decision was the result of the scene between her and her husband when she told him—quietly, as was her manner, and without any screams or tears—that Henkie and Hubbie, despite their tender age, must be sent to boarding-school as soon as possible, for that the gloom of Elias's presence was ruining their infant livers—not lives; it isn't a misprint; but livers. Judith Lossell said so. Neither her printer nor her historian is responsible for what she said. If the chronicler of a woman's many words were responsible for all their foolishness, there would be more—alas! no; there are enough broken-brained geniuses already. There would be no chronicles written at all.

Judith Lossell, however, was mistaken. The decision had been taken without any regard to her opinions, and it

had been taken before the great scene, above-mentioned, came on. That the merchant had allowed his wife to fight it out, under the circumstances, was the result of his inability to inform her of his reasons. He was not accustomed to oppose her, and he positively preferred her to think that she had bullied him into submission. "Anything for a quite life," said this Town Councilor, to whom everybody bent except his consort, but none the less, he stuck to his original resolution that Elias himself should indicate what he preferred.

And this was how the matter was settled. They were alone together in the twilight, after dinner, the father and son. Henkie and Hubbie had just been sent off to bed, and their mother had followed "to tuck them in."

The merchant went over and spoke to the child.

"You can always perceive when Johanna is in the room, or when she touches you, can you not?" he asked.

"Yes, papa," said Elias.

"And can you when your mother does so?"

"No, papa."

"And me—I?"

A long pause.

"Sometimes, papa."

And so Elias went to live with Johanna. And Johanna played with him, and was his horse. Tonnerre also played with him. Henkie and Hubbie occasionally came, by their father's orders, and they, too, would try to play with him. But Tonnerre did not approve of their coming, and persisted in barking at their shins.

At first, a master was procured for him who, without exactly giving what could be described as lessons, had instructions to slip into his conversation such scraps of the most necessary information as could be conveyed in this desultory manner. The master was quite equal to the task thus entrusted to him, and the plan would undoubtedly have worked very satisfactorily had Elias's head been

stronger. But he grew tired, and he could not remember. That was the worst of all. He could only remember what he knew by heart, what he had known for years, or what constantly repeated itself in his experience. Sometimes it almost appeared as if his development had remained stationary with the recurrence of his blindness. And then again something would come out which would prove that this was not the case. Yet he would speak of the autumnal glories of Clarens, as if he had beheld them yesterday, while his teacher would vainly ask for the fiftieth time :

“Elias, what is the capital of France?”

An attempt to teach him reading and writing, according to the methods employed among the blind, proved a failure. The writing, especially, with its confusing combination of dots, greatly excited and fatigued him. At the conclusion of one of these lessons, in which he had strained his powers to the uttermost in his nervous anxiety to succeed, he was laid prostrate by a feverish attack which caused the frightened Johanna to send for the nearest doctor, and then for Hendrik Lossell. The nearest doctor turned out to be Elias's old friend, Pillenaar. He came, magnanimously, and he was in the sick-room when the merchant hurriedly entered it.

“You!” cried Lossell, thus suddenly thrown into the presence of the man he had wronged.

The doctor answered only by a repellent gesture, and continued to busy himself with his little patient. Hendrik Lossell walked away to the window and drummed his fingers against the pane. Presently he drew near again, attracted against his will by the silent old man at the bedside.

“Why are you here?” he asked.

“I was sent for,” replied the physician quietly. “And a physician is not in the habit of asking where they are taking him, but why he is fetched.” He spoke without looking up, and meanwhile he drew from under the patient's

arm the thermometer which had been resting there, and walked with it towards the light.

"You cannot wish well to me or mine," persisted Lossell, "nor can it be an agreeable thought for me that the life of one of my children is in the hands of a man who probably thinks he owes me a bad turn."

"I am having my revenge," said the doctor quietly, as he turned back to the bed.

The father walked up and down for some moments with hesitating step. Then stopping near Pillenaar, he asked, with a visible effort:

"Do you mean that you are hurting the child?"

The doctor paused in the act of measuring out some drops, and looked across at Lossell with eyes full of tranquil scorn: "Fool," he said.

The merchant received the word right in his face, like a well-aimed snowball. He started back. He was accustomed to being called "Worshipful Sir."

He did not speak again, till the other got ready to go. Then he followed him down-stairs, and asked, almost timidly, as they were nearing the hall-door:

"Is the child very ill?"

The doctor stopped under the lamp, in the act of shaking himself into his overcoat: "No," he said. "Not now. The fever was very high when I came, but we have already got it down half a degree. Did I not tell you I was having my revenge? The boy will get better, Mynheer Lossell, but there will be no more lessons for him. His nurse tells me he is learning to read and write. I shall stop that. I have told her so. I shall give publicity to the facts that I found your son in this condition and that I have forbidden your continuing to 'improve his mind.' And if I find that you disregard my advice, I shall make public that little conversation of ours which led to your nearly ruining me in the mortgage affair. I have never mentioned it to anyone yet. But I sha'n't allow you to make away with this un-



fortunate son of yours. Did not I tell you that I was having my revenge? Good night."

"Stop," cried the wretched father, roused by these unmerited, yet excusable, taunts. "You wrong me. Before God, you wrong me. It was no intention of mine to hurt the child. I do not deny that I would rather he had died when he was first stricken down. It would have been happier, above all for him. If you think these years of wretchedness have been preferable, I cannot help differing from you. I was angry with you, chiefly for your manner. I was unreasonable. I admit it. But I have never lifted a hand against one hair of his head, neither then nor since!"

The doctor had stood curiously watching Hendrik Lossell's face.

"No," he said, when the merchant ceased speaking, "I dare say not. You are not one of those who kill, only one of those who cause to die. I can't fathom your whys and your wherefores, Right Worshipful Heer Lossell, but I know that, for some reason or other, you would rather have that poor unfortunate out of the way—do you dare deny it?"

The merchant winced. "If Providence thought fit to call him to a happier sphere," he answered, "once more, who would dare wish for his remaining here?"

"Providence!" interrupted the old doctor testily, "Providence! That is only another word for 'timely foresight.' Your providence provides for yourself, Mynheer Lossell. But I advise it to look out."

"I swear that it is false," cried Lossell hotly. "And to prove to you that you wrong me, as well as to shield myself from your attacks, I will follow your instructions in all things concerning the boy. Nobody else shall touch him in future. He has always retained a liking for you. Doctor him as much as you choose, and revenge yourself for any wrong I may have done you by charging me whatever sum you may please. Do you accept?"

The tea-merchant was indeed roused to an unusual pitch

of agitation, or he would never have committed himself to so rash a proposal. But he was growing old—with worry, more than with years—and his arithmetic was no longer as hard and fast as it used to be.

“I accept,” said Doctor Pillenaar, after a moment’s hesitation, “for the child’s sake. My charge is a dollar a visit. And you know it.”

No more lessons. No more struggling after fleeting images, that ran and ran the harder he strove to retain them. Repose, and fresh air, and tranquil enjoyments—and then a blissful feeling as if the ache were almost gone.

It was Doctor Pillenaar who called in another great medicine-man to come and see Elias, not an oculist, this time, but a learned professor of “psychiatry.” Very few people in Koopstad knew what was meant by psychiatry; it may be doubted whether the wise man himself did, though he was professor of it. An impression got about, however, that a phrenologist had been sent for to feel Elias’s bumps, and Koopstad was perfectly satisfied, though some people did say they would never have thought it of Doctor Pillenaar. “Elias has had one bump on his head, I should think, which could explain the whole matter,” said Henkie. Henkie was an unfeeling lad. Hubbie looked away. He did not like people to speak of that terrible story, which was so old, and yet daily so new.

“It is the brain,” said the professor, saying nothing new, but charging a couple of hundred florins for saying it—and therein will ever lie a subtle comfort for those of us who can afford to pay for it, and especially for those who can’t. “It is the brain. There is undoubtedly a permanent lesion, and probably, in connection with that, as an outcome, yes, I should say, as an outcome of it”—he frowned deeply—“a slow malformation of the brain. Has this deterioration ceased—or has it not? that, honoured colleague, is the question which, if I understand aright, you are desirous of

seeing solved?"—Pillenaar nodded acquiescence, a little impatiently.—"It is a question requiring mature consideration, and requiring, above all, as many data as can possibly be procured. Let us—ahem—have luncheon first, and then we can talk the whole matter over at our ease, as, if we reckon half an hour for the meal, I shall still have twenty minutes till my train leaves for—ahem—home."

They called in Hendrik Lossell, as soon as their conference had been hurried over, and they told him the result.

"Nothing could be settled with any degree of certainty. On the whole, it was probable, judging by the experience of the last years, that the boy's brain would still suffer further derangement. It might safely be assumed, however, that such alteration, if it did occur, would manifest itself very tardily. Years might elapse before any noticeable change took place. On the other hand, the patient might"—the professor paused and glanced inquiringly from the father to Dr. Pillenaar. The latter motioned to him to proceed—"The patient might lose other senses, as he had already lost these. The eyes were sound; the ears were intact, the mischief therefore lay in the channels of communication between these organs and the central consciousness. It was possible, however, that the work of destruction had now come to a standstill. It was also possible that, if it continued, the patient might lapse into idiocy." Dr. Pillenaar nodded. "The great man did not think this was likely, too long a period having already elapsed. More could not be said with certainty. But what had been said before was certain, taking the accompanying restrictions into account. And, if the cab was waiting?—thank you—perhaps it would be better to wake the cabman."

"I understand," said Lossell, confusedly following the great light of science, "that only the brain is diseased?"

"Certainly. Undoubtedly. Probably. Of course. The constitution is healthy, not absolutely robust, but far from

unsound. Rather the reverse. Remarkably sound. With care the child may live to be a hundred. It is this very fact of his general healthiness that proves there must be some local flaw."

"Then, could we not," stammered the merchant on the steps, "could we not—as I see the great doctors do in Vienna—with stomachs, you know, insert new ones of—of pigskin—it's in all the papers—could we not renovate the diseased part of the brain—remove it, you know, and—and insert new—piece, professor!"

"Pig's brains?" queried the professor. His cab was coming up to the front steps. "Well, hardly. And what use would they be to your son, my dear sir, if he had them? How could he become a doctor or a lawyer or a parson, with the brains of a pig?"

"I don't want him to become that," said Hendrik Lossell, innocently pursuing his direct line of thought, without deferring to his companion's. "I want him to become a merchant like myself."

"No, no; he would only do for a doctor," interposed Pillenaar bitterly.

"We have not got quite as far as that yet," said the student of the human soul (seen from the outside), as he settled himself in his conveyance. "Nor has the Vienna doctor, whatever he may do in ten years' time. But we have done great things, none the less, in psychiatry, very great things indeed, considering"—he added complacently—"that nobody ever did anything before us."

"And what have you done?" asked Lossell, thinking discontentedly of his departed bank-notes, the open carriage-door in his hand.

"We have classified, my dear sir. We have classified. And we have found a great number of people to be mad whom nobody ever imagined to be mad before."

"And have you," asked Lossell, "found a good many so-called mad people to be sane?"

"Well, no, hardly that," replied the "psychiater," somewhat taken aback, "hardly that, no. I should scarcely say that. Would you tell him to drive to the Northern Station? Thank you. I am much obliged to you. I have not the slightest doubt your boy will do very well indeed."

The carriage drove away. "We have been born too early," said Lossell sadly, as he turned into the house. "It is our misfortune. If we had only lived twenty years later, the doctors would have spoken of a new brain for Elias, as the parsons now speak of a new heart, and he would have been a good man of business yet, and all would have been well." He sighed heavily. "And now all is wrong," he said.

## CHAPTER XI.

### “LIKE A STREAM UNDER A WILLOW-TREE.”

AND so Elias grew up, with the old brain that would not work as it ought to, watched over and cared for in his daily needs and perplexities by Johanna's motherly affection, and protected, from a distance, by Doctor Pillenaar, against all mistakes and misconceptions. After some years Tonnerre died, of old age, and that was the first intense grief he had known since his blindness. His father obtained for him—at great expense and at almost greater pains—an exactly similar little animal from a London dealer who probably stole it as a last resource—but Elias would have none of the little stranger. “It was ungrateful of him,” said Judith Lossell, “after all the trouble his father had taken.” And therein she was right. She was always right; and you always had a sneaking feeling that she ought to have been wrong. She had a talent for stating tiresome truths that nobody wanted to believe.

It was disagreeable for her, too, to find this deaf duffer, this blind idiot that nobody wanted to live, outgrowing her own children daily in health and strength and outer beauty. For Hendrik and Hubert—Henkie and Hubble no longer—had developed into little business-mannikins such as you can find in any number, if you care to look, on the exchange and mart of Koopstad. They were small and spare, with close-cropped heads and yellow complexions, and they smelt of “Jockey Club.” They were over-dressed, into just that shade of over-dressing which is peculiar to the sons of mer-



chant-princes. They had aristocratic tastes, for they hated the Jews, and never swallowed a glass of wine without saying that it might have been better; and they knew all about everybody and everything.

Elias, on the contrary, living in God's great solitude of boundless fresh air and almost unbroken silence, grew up with such a frame as we all might be troubled with, were civilization not there to refine us. From a puny, pale-faced laddie he developed into a man of six feet two, with a chest like a drum and a voice like a trumpet, a man with the limbs of—no, no, not those eternalized effeminate appendages of a Greek god—with the limbs of an old Batouwer from the forests of the Rhine. And there was something unavoidably affecting in the combination of this great display of physical strength with a certain timidity of movement—alas, much of the old childish grace was gone!—and a slight stoop of the head, the natural results of his blindness. He had retained that golden shimmer over his curly locks which so seldom outstays the golden sunshine of childhood, and his face had grown handsome with the repose of harmonious lines. The sightless eyes were usually closed; for long hours he would sit thus silent, curtained from that outer world he could not gaze upon; but it was when he swept up the long-lashed eyelids that you understood how it came that women called the blind fool, Elias Lossell, the most beautiful man in Koopstad.

He had inherited, with his mother's rather insignificant regularity of feature, the fathomless splendour of his father's eyes—those eyes that had purchased Volderdoes Zonen. But in the son's unilluminated orbs there slept a sadness, a tender, pitiful pleading, irresistible as that attraction of deep, dark water which compels you to look again. It was impossible to realize that such glory of love and sorrow could fall back upon the beholder from a soulless mirror. And who shall say, indeed, that these tranquil depths could give forth none of their own inner light because they could

receive none from the radiance around them? It was that gentle, fugitive pleading which broke across the stillness, like a ripple on a lake, a something indefinite, something lacking, like a prayer and a regret, that moved you to the very centre of your being, you could scarcely have reasoned out why. Eyes that look forth upon the world's little ups and downs are swept by every change of sentiment; only sightless repose could burn with such a steadfast flame of sadness, and of love that conquers regret.

How well I remember those eyes of Elias Lossell's—nay, forgive the epic poet that the strength of a personal reminiscence should break through your neat little rules—I have good cause to remember. For they did me brave service once, many years ago, when I was not as old, and therefore not as wise, a man as I have become since. I had been to hear a stupid lecture, which had impressed me very much, because there were a number of scientific terms in it which I could not understand, and which, therefore, I knew must all contain as many undeniable truths. It was all about the origin of man, and it had proved to me—irrefutably—that I, like the rest of the human race, was nothing but a perfected cell. I could appreciate that argument—about life, and humanity, being a gigantic sell. In my darker moments I had often reasoned it out for myself. And there was nothing but matter and force, and nothing worth living for, except life. It was all very beautiful and simple, and you had only got to persuade yourself you liked it, even when you had the toothache or the heartache, and there you were. I was thinking it over, and wondering to myself why I could not immediately realize that that perfected anthropoid ape, Graziella (my heart's queen at the moment; I found out afterwards that her name was Jane), was not a bit more perfected than all other she-anthropoid apes. I was reproaching myself with my foolishness in not comprehending more readily that there was nothing inside anybody's body except that body itself. I understood per-

fectly how all my good and evil instincts had developed themselves out of my original cellular ancestor, and, the particulars having got somewhat jumbled in my head, I was ready to affirm that I owed my dislike of mint-sauce to the wolf's disagreeable habit of eating his lamb raw, and my short-sightedness to the eagle's equally unreasonable custom of staring needlessly at the sun. For I had understood the lecturer to say distinctly that everybody was descended from everybody else, and that all our qualities could be explained by the fact that somebody else had had them before us. In fact, I was converted to the very latest scientific discoveries of that day. Two years afterwards I happened to hear the same lecturer again, and I found that he was most anxious to tell us that all he had told us last time had been proved to be wrong. I could have told him that sooner. I had learned it, not from a wise man but from a fool. And I had found my soul again, while he was still looking for his. I heard him say that he quite expected to light upon it soon in the development of the carrier-pigeon out of the pigeon that can't carry anything at all. I believe this has actually happened since, for I was informed the other day that he was perfectly happy in a scientific squabble with a brother inventor—I mean discoverer—who maintains that, wherever the soul of man may be, the soul of woman can distinctly be traced to the pouter.

I was wandering down the street, then, with a jumble of these latter-day truths in my head, when I suddenly remembered that Elias Lossell had been unwell of late, and that I had promised my mother to go and inquire after him. So I walked out of the town towards the house where he lived, and I found him sitting up by his fire, for he was better. I talked with him a little—you could always get Johanna to interpret—and then I lapsed into silence, facing him, with only the hearth between us. And presently, in the darkness and confusion of my thoughts, he lifted his drooping eyes and turned them full upon me—turned them

with their sightless immensity of a sorrow that has conquered itself. I got up, and pressed his hand, and went out. And ever since, though I respect the earthworm no less, nor the domestic pigeon, nor even the tailless ape, I believe that the humblest human intellect is the servant of a soul which sprang from God, and that the loftiest is nothing more.

Elias had fortunately a small number of hobbies which were practicable even to his enfeebled intellect. Chief of these, strangely enough, was the amusement—for with him it could not be called an art—of gardening. His great delight was to potter about in a small bit of garden, with the aid of a gardener, and to plant combinations of brilliant colour, which his eye could never behold. He would feel the flowers carefully, and request that they might be minutely described to him; then he would set to work, taking them one by one from the heaps in which his assistant had laid them and arranging them according to his fancy. And thus it was also his supreme enjoyment to make up his own flowers into nosegays and send them to anyone that had shown him kindness. But he could never remember for any length of time where the various kinds had been planted, and had to ask day after day if they were in bloom.

And gradually a number of pets were gathered around him, not to fill up 'Tonnerre's place, but to live and die beside him. For Elias could never remember that Tonnerre was dead, and, when a new dog was brought into the room, he would ask after his old playmate, and he would even cry because they said Tonnerre was gone. Johanna could never quite succeed in breaking him of that petulant habit of crying when he wanted to have his way.

Other pets, however, were given him by friends, and he made them all welcome; white mice, a tame squirrel, a big cat whom he taught to respect the mice, and a couple of canaries. They were quite a family of friends to him,

with their separate names and their individual peculiarities, and he liked to tell you about them and their tricks. The canaries were his favourites, "because of their beautiful song," he said, and he declared—was it a fancy of his or not?—that he could always know when they sang—of course without distinguishing a note—by the movement their music occasioned in the air around him. Thus, in the care of his "menagerie," as Henkie called it, his heart found opportunities of extending its affections, and Johanna often told him laughingly that she was jealous of his winged and four-footed loves. "I don't know," said Elias slowly on one of these occasions. He always spoke slowly, as if looking for his words. "I should like to love everybody, only that it seems like loving nobody. But I love you best, Johanna, except myself."

Presently he added :

"I—I love myself very much, Johanna. Do you love yourself better than me?"

Any lie seemed preferable to the truth for a moment, for the woman shrank from the seeming self-complacency of the confession. And then she said angrily aloud : "He is only he, after all," and yet she blushed deeply as she spelled on his neck : "No, I think I love you better, Elias."

He sat quiet for a moment, and then he said softly : "I didn't know. I thought it was very good of me to be so fond of you. I think I should like to love you better, Johanna, than I love myself. But I love myself very much. And I think I would rather have myself happy than anybody else's happiness."

Elias was about twenty when he thus spoke. He was too foolish not to distinguish better between what is and what we suppose to be.

"It is no use trying to develop his intellect," Dr. Pillenaar had repeatedly said to Johanna. "He can't stand it. And, especially, he can't stand efforts to increase his



stock of knowledge. Working on his memory is useless, and can only do harm. Try what you can achieve with his moral sense, his affections, his standard of right and wrong, and so on. I am not very hopeful, but any improvement can only come from thence. Instruction is out of the question. I do not say that a certain amount—a moderate amount—of education may not be attainable with patience and tact. I believe you have both, my good woman, at least where this youth is concerned. See what you can do for him. A man may be a man, though he doesn't know the multiplication-table, all the better, perhaps, for never having realized that himself and nine fellow-creatures only make a I and a Nought."

Johanna undertook her task and worked it out with laborious devotion. In fact, she had begun it long before Dr. Pillenaar mentioned the subject. At Clarens she had been amazed to discover that Elias's whole idea of moral distinctions was based upon "Mamma likes" and "Mamma doesn't like"—a rule good enough in itself, perhaps, but surely only as the outer court to an inner temple. Elias reposed tranquilly upon the consideration that wrong became wrong through your mother's finding it out. Right became wrong, for that matter, if it interfered with the good lady's comfort, and certainly wrong became altogether right, if she happened—through ignorance or carelessness—not to object to it. It was, in its way, a very complicated system, because its single instances all had to be judged apart, without any possible reduction to general rules; but, on the other hand, it had the advantage of offering a superficial but fully satisfactory solution of each difficulty, immediately it supervened, so that you could always know, for the moment at least, what to do and what not to do. But, away from his stepmother's scoldings, Elias was as a vessel without a rudder. He was anxious to find out Johanna's opinions on various subjects, and he set himself to do so with laudable earnestness. "Mamma won't allow me to



keep my wet boots on when there's company,” he said, “but, Johanna, there's no company here.”

Johanna devoted her life to the rousing in his torpid nature of a consciousness of the fundamental principles of right and wrong. “Elias good,” “Elias not good”—as with a little child. It was up-hill work, at first, not that she found him unwilling to learn, but the narrow limits of his horizon made it difficult for him to oversee problems which belong to the most intricate the human race must grapple with, while yet he had natural sensitiveness of conscience enough partly to perceive them upon his path. “If it's bad of me, what makes me want to do it?” he would ask, for instance. And upon Johanna's replying that it was the devil who tempted him, “Then why didn't God forget to make the devil when he made all the rest?” said the fool.

And the worst of it was that his brain had not elasticity enough to cast off a perplexity which had once got itself wedged fast. He would repeat a question like the above over and over again during many weeks, always forgetting the answer he had received a few hours before. And Johanna would answer with unaltering patience that she did not know, or that nobody knew, or at last—when this solution left him longing for somebody who did know—that God did not make the devil, but that the devil made himself.

He had not strength of mind enough to leap beyond so satisfactory an answer, and therefore found contentment in it, until he forgot—and asked again.

But, whatever might become of the theological abstractions, one practical lesson Johanna found easy enough to drive home. The simple duty of doing little kindnesses was one which he understood with eager aptitude; in fact, there was considerable danger of his missing the idea of duty in the pleasure which this fulfilment of duty occasioned him. And soon it became the greatest reward for good behaviour that he should be allowed to give some trifle away.

His nurse encouraged him, in his dull life, to seek this diversion as much as possible. And they would go out into the country cottages together, and with his own hand Elias would distribute what he had brought. He made friends in this way among the cottage children. He would speak to them, and some of them would get over their alarm when they saw how gentle and kindly he was. This simple philanthropy of alms-giving, which estimable people will probably think ought not to have been permitted, was an ever-increasing source of pleasurable occupation, and it brought him into contact with his fellow-creatures as he would not otherwise have been brought. Then, after a time, it became not only mere alms-giving, when Elias got to know individual cases. And his serene presence in the cottages was in itself a lesson which only they could overlook who were blinder than he.

For, after the poignant hope and fear of the first months, and the stagnant agony which succeeded them, Elias sank into more cheerful repose. At first they who watched over him dreaded that this tranquillity might deepen into apathy, but the untiring devotion of his faithful nurse drew him slowly out of his lethargic resignation into a taste for the various occupations which have been indicated above. And as the years passed on, and his health grew stronger, some new interest would be added from time to time to the little circle which was already his.

Of games, unfortunately, he could only play the simplest.

His head was, of course, not strong enough for chess, or draughts, or even dominoes, in the study of which he might otherwise have whiled away so many a weary hour. But he could play an occasional game of "solitaire" in his loneliness, and, extraordinary as it may seem, he had selected the game of "spillikens" as his especial favourite. The merely mechanical skill was within his comprehension, and the extreme delicacy of his touch enabled him to discern if the piece he was lifting came into contact with another.

He learnt through long practice to judge of the position of the set by lightly passing his fingers over the little heap, and, if he failed to notice a movement, Johanna would be near to give a hint. He attained great proficiency through constant repetition, and it was a strange sight to watch this blind creature bending, with contracted brows, over the simple game which would seem to require, as one might think, keenness of eye quite as much as sureness of hand.

Very, very slowly the shadows deepened over his already clouded intellect. With all her love Johanna could not avert them; with all her hopefulness she could not ignore their coming. Almost imperceptibly in the enforced seclusion in which he lived, hedged in on every side, the lights of human intelligence went out one by one. He forgot more and more, his little stock of knowledge growing less—he experienced yet greater difficulty in finding his words. He began to speak of himself in the third person, as little children do: "Elias wants to," "Elias will be good."

And yet—to her who knew him best because she loved him, it seemed as if with the increase of his manhood he grew gentler, kinder, more affectionate.

And his father knew only this. He knew that he had constantly asked the boy: "Are you happy, Elias?" And at first, there had been no reply possible, and then the lad had sometimes said: "I suppose so, Papa," and now the man would often answer: "Yes."

And the days were like each other, and the years were like the days, only longer, and when Elias was twenty-five, Hendrik Lossell died.

## CHAPTER XII.

### VOLDERDOES ZONEN.

HENDRIK Junior was nineteen, and had entered his father's office the year before. Hubert, being more backward than his brother, was to remain a little longer at the School of Commerce. They had worked together originally until Hubert, not having "passed" on one occasion, had been forced to see Hendrik move into a higher form without him. This separation had naturally caused a change in their pursuits, their companions, their hours and courses of work. They had been compelled to go each his separate way, and from being almost always together, they had come to consider it natural that the one should not know for hours what the other was doing. "I wish you would help me with my work, Henk," said Huib, "as you used to when we worked together." "Oh, I can't bother," said Henk. "I've forgotten all that rot since I moved up. It seems years ago since I learnt it." Good-natured Huib winced.

Dutch boys talk Dutch slang. Their repertoire is small, and lacks the picturesqueness of English school-talk. Still, they are as convinced as their coevals over the water that there is a good deal rotten in the bill of fare prepared for their intellectual nourishment, and the term used above can therefore certainly not be considered misplaced. And schoolboy-talk is untranslatable. To the connoisseur it always seems delightful, salt and bracing and ever fresh,

like a breeze from the hills of youth. What a good thing it is that the mammas so seldom hear it! It only reaches them, as a rule, through the medium of the young ladies' schoolroom, and from the lips of these it tastes like bottled sea-water, and not a bit like bottled breeze. No, a girl should not talk slang. She always knows she is talking it. And therefore in her it becomes affectation, while its very essence is "unavoidableness." In the boy's case it comes bubbling from the lips with irresistible simplicity, and you feel that it is the harmonious vehicle of his thoughts. It is keen, supple, gleaming. And it strikes straight. With the young lady whose governess is teaching her how to hand a parcel—pooh! do you remember that old fable?—hush! let us be polite, even to the slang talkster:

"There once was a lion that went out walking in a donkey-skin.

"And everybody noticed how much softer a donkey's skin is by nature than a lion's."

Fables are wearisome things till you get to the moral; and then they become provoking.

At least, so I have always found them, but most people whom I have questioned on the subject have told me they considered fables were very instructive, because they give you a much clearer insight into the faults of your fellow-creatures.

It is unfortunately hardly correct that Dutch schoolboys delight in slang. They have but few idiomatic expressions, and these are often of very unpleasing origin. Alas that they should make up for the deficiency by oaths.

Then, why, it may be asked, this dissertation upon the subject? There was a man once who possessed a coat but no peg to hang it on. So, having honestly earned his coat, he stole a peg. He thought that the coat would hide the peg. And so it did, but, as it hung loose in the air, the detectives cleverly remarked that the peg must be behind it. And they took the peg away, and the coat, and the

man; and upon the latter the critics sat down—no, I mean the detectives. And so he died.

Hendrik went into his father's office. And he began to talk about "'Change." They call it the "Purse" in Holland, as everywhere on the Continent, and Elias had long believed that it was a great bag full of money, hung up somewhere, and that his father and all other people's fathers went down to it every afternoon and took out as much as they wanted. He asked why the ragged children's fathers did not go down to the "Bourse." "Elias," said Hendrik, "is an unutterable fool." The adjective was painfully true.

Hendrik Junior was not a fool. Even the many who did not like him unhesitatingly admitted that he was a smart young man. His father's old clerks beamed upon him, when he sat down before his office desk, spreading out his spidery little legs on a magenta-coloured sheepskin, and knotting his little black eyebrows, as he struck a quick hand through a thick bundle of papers, with an incisive "Let's see." "Volderdoes Zonen" was not merely a wholesale tea-shop. It was a great house in the best sense of the word, a social institution, and—to a certain extent—what might be called a tribal family. All those who were connected with it and its far-spreading interests, were connected with each other. The mighty head of the firm, looming bald and sacred, in the far distance of his sanctum behind glass doors that opened into the outer office, was Volderdoes Zonen incarnate, but the youngest errand-boy, who stared timidly from the entrance-hall, as he came up with his message, across lines of desks and bended heads, towards a solemn silence where mortals scarce dared tread, felt that he, too, somehow and in some infinitesimal manner, was "Volderdoes Zonen," and rejoiced in the thought. Outside, where he waited, was a perpetual clamour of rail-cars, a babel of voices, the continual thud of heavy cases,



the monotonous rush of ropes on the pulley—and men, with grave, preoccupied faces, passed him rapidly, going to and fro through the great doors. Inside was silence, except for the buzz of voices in the so-called “Strangers’ Office”—nothing but the occasional rustle of a leaf, or a fragment of a whispered conversation, as one clerk would step over for a moment to consult with another. Sometimes a handbell would ring with a sharp, electric twang from the chief’s table, and a name would be called out—in a clear and imperative key. Then some quiet worker would lay down his pen and pass through the glass division, into the presence of his sovereign. The oldest of them never listened for the name which must follow that electric signal without a moment’s quiver of expectation. It was the only occasion on which Volderdoes Zonen’s clerks laid down their pens unwiped.

And from the yard and the quays beyond it came the boom of the machinery, the rustle of the descending lift, the “heigh-ho’s” to the horses among the clatter of hoofs and the whistle of whips, hour after hour, day after day through the winter rains, when the great stoves were lighted inside, and round by the sweet, soft, summer months when all the windows were opened, and, amid the scents of tea and machine-oil and lilacs, the twittering of the city-sparrows broke in upon the ceaseless scratching of the pens. There was not one of them from the oldest to the youngest (not the sparrows, rather the pens) but felt “Volderdoes Zonen” to be eternal, without beginning and without ending, like the world they lived in.

Hendrik Lossell himself, they felt, though he was an incorporation and a symbol, was not the eternal Idea, any more than William I. or William II. is the Empire. He would go, as he had come, and Hendrik II. would come in his turn, and go also, but the unity of which all the busy workers were component parts was not dependent on any of them for its existence, either the greatest or the least.

Hendrik Lossell, however, was fully conscious that for the time being, at any rate, the sceptre rested in his hand. Not that he allowed it to rest; he swayed it with that kind of impersonal government which is usually described as "stern" by those who are passively, and "just" by those who are actively connected with it. Disobedience meant instant dismissal; obedience could not always mean immediate reward. That was unavoidable, and the management of so extensive a business required, you may be certain, a firm hand as well as a quick one. "Office hours are too short for good work, as it is," Lossell would say to some penitent promising amendment; "I can't pay for bad." "There's no room for repentance in business," he used to remark. "If you want to repent, I must leave you free to do so at home." Whoever might be head of his household, there was no doubt who was master in the office. Perhaps he found some sweet compensation in the thought. Who shall tell?

And when he himself was found out in some omission, or some positive error? Well, that would occur at times, of course; and the moment was an awful one. It happened upon one occasion that a mistake had been made which involved a considerable loss. The confidential clerk who had to broach the matter to his master trembled in his shoes, not for himself, for the fault was Lossell's. The clerk had been in the office more than forty years; he had served old Elias long before anyone had thought of the present head of the firm. He spoke calmly, despite his tremor, politely, positively. The chief reddened, looked up with an uncomfortable glance, looked down at the papers before him. "Yes," he said, "Mr. Hopman, there has been an altogether inexcusable mistake. I am very much vexed, very much displeased, that such a mistake should have occurred, and I must bear the consequences."

The old clerk understood. It was Volderdoes Zonen scolding Hendrik Lossell.

But Volderdoes Zonen did not send Hendrik Lossell away.

The walls of the private room were hung with the firm's historic mementoes; diplomas of honour, an appointment to the Jury of a Great Exhibition, a framed and glazed letter from a European sovereign long since dead. They were spread out there as the captured banners adorn the chapel of a conqueror. And high above the monumental mantel-piece, with its solemn clock, sat enthroned the life-sized portrait of a Chinese Grandee, a splendour of flowered silk under a pair of little twinkling slits of celestial Cheatery, a Li-Foo-Something, who had earned his highest button by robbing his Imperial Master in company with old Elias's father.

This heathen Chineese was the tutelary deity of the house. He pervaded it, as such a patron spirit should, for old Elias had turned his father's friend into a trademark—alas, the illustrious dead!—and everything belonging to the business, even the charwoman's dusters, that came out of their cupboard on Saturday afternoon, bore the image of the tea-honoured Mandarin. He was an actual Presence; they believed in him down at "Volderdoes Zonen's," and spoke of him and to him, as if he really were responsible for the fortunes of the firm. The warehousemen had a superstition among them, laughed at, yet not altogether despised, that the great cases could not come to grief as long as the Chinaman-label upon them remained intact. And when old Volderdoes celebrated his silver-jubilee as head of the business, the whole of the staff clubbed together, big and little, every member of the vast family, the errand-boys subscribing five cents, and presented him with a silver dessert-service, in which silver mandarins sat under silver palm-trees, bearing crystal dishes. There were any number of silver mandarins, fit type of the spoil which the astute Li had divided between himself and his Christian confederate. Judith Lossell spread them over her table on all state oc-

casions, for she was a merchant's daughter and had a merchant's daughter's pride.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Hendrik Junior. He believed in silver, and in Chinamen, but he did not believe in tutelary deities, nor, in fact, in any deity, whether adverse or otherwise. He did not even believe overmuch in "Volderdoes Zonen." At home he spoke of it as "the shop," but not when any stranger was by. It was an unavoidable formality for making money to him, nothing more. Money was the one thing worth having, on this beastly planet. If you could have got it without any trouble, so much the better, but, as you could not, well, "Volderdoes Zonen" came handy. He considered himself especially praiseworthy for looking at matters in this light. He knew men enough who wanted money but were too lazy to work for it. He did not realize how great his wish for money was.

Well, but he worked hard for it. And when the day's work was over, he would go and spend his evening quietly at the opera, especially if there was a ballet, or at one of the little theatres where you laugh without knowing why. And if he wanted other pleasures, he took them without troubling anybody about them, and there was never any scandal or unpleasantness in connection with young Hendrik Lossell's name. He was altogether a most estimable young man. There were many such in Koopstad.

He quite forgot in a month or two that poor Hubert, still at school, was his twin-brother. He thought of him, and soon spoke of him, as the younger son. And so, indeed, he was, though only by several minutes. He grew younger daily, however, in the new-fledged merchant's eye.

"That's your brother, ain't it, Lossell?" said a fresh chum, also a merchant-princelet, when they met Hubert coming along the street with his books under his arm. "Yes," said Hendrik, with a good-humoured smile, "c'est mon cadet, you know. He goes to school."

Elias also knew something, in his vague way, of the greatness of Volderdoes Zonen. He had grown up under the shadow of the house, and as a child, before his troubles came upon him, he had played in the warehouses and watched the men at their work. The memory had remained with him, and would abide in his heart for ever, as those experiences of our earlier years become our companions through life. He did not, certainly, know much of the intricacies of commerce; but he did know, for his father had repeated it to him almost daily for many years, that "Volderdoes Zonen" was a thing to be honoured and revered, as the source of all good to himself and to all his relations. It was as if the merchant had set himself to inspire his eldest son with a cult of the historic name, he who left all impressions of religion or morality to a servant. Probably he had good reasons for his conduct, and could have told you why such strange conversations as the following were so common between him and the son who had attained to manhood, and who would live through his whole existence, without ever coming into contact with that busy world in which the merchant dwelt.

"Elias, what is your father? Tell me, do you remember?"

"Head of the house of 'Volderdoes Zonen,' Papa. The *great* house of 'Volderdoes Zonen,' I mean."

"And what was your grandfather?"

"He was the same, Papa."

"And what would you like to be best of all, if you could work?"

"I don't know, Papa. I forget."

"Yes, you do"—impatiently. "Think."

A silence. Then suddenly: "I should like to be a doctor, Papa, and make all the sick people well."

"No, no. You would like better still to be what your father and grandfather have been, would you not?"

"Henk may be that, Papa."

"Very well, so he may, now you can't. But you ought to have been it. And it is the grandest thing in the world. But now you will like Hendrik to be it, when I am dead; will you not? What would you do, Elias, if people came and told you, after my death, that you mustn't allow Hendrik to take my place?"

"I would kill them, Papa." The strong man clenched his fists, and involuntarily spread out his massive chest.

"No, no, that is not necessary. But you would tell them that Hendrik must take it; would you not?"

"Yes, Papa, but"—an expression of extreme anxiety—"you are not going to go away, are you?"

"No; I hope not. But listen, Elias, what would become of you, if Volderdoes Zonen ceased to exist?"

"I should die of hunger," answered Elias rapidly, and by rote. "Or else people would come and take me away, and lock me up in an asylum, and everything would be very miserable and poor."

"That is true. You will never forget it?"

"No, Papa."

And the merchant went his way.

It was like a catechism.

"Johanna," said Elias presently, "why are some people poor and some people rich?"

"Because it's good for them," replied Johanna, who was an optimist, or she could not have lived with the fool.

"And am I rich?" asked Elias.

"Yes. Or at least your father is."

"And are you poor?"

"Yes."

"It seems to be very much the same thing," declared Elias, after a period of slow thought. "I suppose, the devil made the poor people first, and then God made the rich people to help them, and so he put it all right again?"

Johanna did not answer him.



"I am glad God gave us 'Volderdoes Zonen' to look after us," he went on. "It was very good of Him. And I shall thank Him for it every day."

And he did.

It was a few days after the conversation recorded above, the last of many, that Hendrik Lossell's tenure of office as head of "Volderdoes Zonen" came to an end.

"I have got a pain in the left side," he said to his wife at breakfast one morning. "Do you know, I think it must be something the matter with my heart. I have felt it once or twice before, of late."

"Oh, nonsense!" replied Judith carelessly. "How fussy you men always are! It's just nothing but a little wind. I know the feeling quite well. I've had it, myself."

He did not continue the subject, but presently got up to go to the office as usual.

Mevrouw Lossell followed him to the door.

"Don't forget to look in at Ramaker's," she said, "and tell them to be quite sure to have the fresh turbot for Tuesday. It's a bad day for fish. I wish we could have had our dinner-party on another day."

"I can't help it, Judith," he replied, a little wearily, "as I told you before. I must attend the Town Council on Wednesday, and the meeting of the Chamber of Commerce on Thursday, and *you* won't have it on a Friday or a Saturday; so there you are."

"Ah, well!" she said, with an injured air. "In any case, don't forget."

"I sha'n't forget," he replied, and was gone.

He drove out to Elias first this morning, as he noticed that he had plenty of time. He had made it a rule, from which he only deviated under stress of circumstances, to give his eldest son at least a few minutes every day, but he usually went to him in the afternoon.

Elias was surprised and delighted to receive his father

at so early an hour. This visit was a continual treat to him, the great event of his uneventful day. For Hendrik Lossell had acquired much facility in Johanna's method of conversing with the deaf man—Elias's method, as she proudly called it, for had he not been its inventor?—and in his own peculiar way the father was kind to his son, kind almost against his will, one would feel inclined to say. It was against his will that he often wished Elias dead; it was against his will that he often treated him with generosity and affection. This unfortunate son was to him not so much an unpleasing personage as an adverse circumstance. But he did his best—he had always done his best—to treat him well, none the less.

"Papa," said Elias this morning, "Elias tired. Elias often so tired. And forget words. Elias not talk much."

"It is one of his bad days," interposed Johanna, who had been bustling about the room, getting things ready for her charge. "He has been complaining of headache all the morning. When he has one of these bad headaches, he is very dull and stupid. I think they get rarer, as time goes on, but—do you know, sir?—I think they get worse."

The father went up to his son and stood looking at him intently for some moments. Presently he groaned audibly. And then, turning suddenly away, as if to hide his confusion, he said to the woman:

"He is a beautiful man."

"Indeed, that he is, Mynheer," assented Johanna energetically. A vision rose up before her of Henkie and Hubbie, yellow-faced, sharp-featured, groomed and oiled and smartened up, as she turned towards the silent, statuesque figure, motionless in its customary arm-chair, and stood gazing lovingly upon that noble Olympian head, with its glory of golden curls and the line of patient suffering over the closed and tranquil eyes.

"Good-bye, Elias," spelled the father.

"Good-bye, Papa."

"You love me, after all—don't you?—in spite of all?"

"Of course I love you, Papa."

Hendrik Lossell turned to go. The woman passed out and opened the hall-door for him.

"You yourself look far from well, sir," she said. "Hadn't you better see a doctor too, once in a way?"

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you, Johanna," he answered, as he got into his brougham.

"If the boy becomes completely idiotic," he muttered as the carriage bore him away, "he may as well become it without loss of time. It would be the best thing that could happen, I suppose, on the whole."

He almost invariably alluded to this full-grown son as "the boy." What more was he? Nay, in fact he was barely that. And yet he was not a child, as other children are.

The merchant's face twitched once or twice, as if with sudden pain, and he gave a sigh of relief when the coachman drew up at last in front of the warehouse. He thought to himself with a half-smile, as he let himself slowly out and crossed the busy threshold, that it was now more than twenty-five years since he had entered the office at that hour as a partner in the concern. Day after day, month after month—but for an occasional brief summer holiday at some foreign watering-place—had he done what he was doing now. The same twist through the same side-door and down the same passage. The same "Good-days" among yesterday's unchanged surroundings. He hung up his coat and hat on their accustomed peg. And then, in turning to take his place before his desk, he cast the same invariable glance towards the clock. And the clock marked the same invariable hour.

He sat down and drew the day's bundle of business towards him. Hendrik would not be in for an hour or so. "No use trying to make young folks give up old habits," he said to himself.

And then he settled down to the day's work.

A packer had been turned off for carelessness, and had appealed from his immediate superior to Cæsar. Hendrik Lossell went into the matter as was his wont. He found that the man had indeed been to blame, though in no serious degree, but he maintained the dismissal, in spite of prayers and entreaties.

"Not time enough for good work," he repeated, "still less for bad." And then he returned to his own.

And when Hendrik Junior came in about half an hour later, he found that our common master, Death, had touched the chief of the great house of "Volderdoes Zonen," and dismissed him from his post.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE HEAD OF THE FIRM.

HENDRIK LOSSELL, Hendrik Junior no longer, stepped towards the glass doors and drew them to. Then with one rapid jerk of the wrist he swept the broad "portière," which hung handy, across that wide surface of glass. From time to time the chief of the house would thus close out the office, when he wanted to be alone. And then the son went back to his father's prostrate figure, thrown forward across the desk. He did not for one moment doubt that this was death. He saw the seal set plainly upon the rigid face. "Death," he said in an undertone, and his little figure trembled from head to foot with a couple of quick, nervous thrills. And then he drew, with unsteady hand, the keys of the great safe from his father's trousers pocket, where he knew they were always kept. He had to unfasten a button of the pocket to get at them, and for a moment he shrank back in disgust. "Allons," he said, aloud. And then he struck a quick blow on his father's bell, and, holding the curtained door ajar for one moment, he called out the name of the head clerk, his father's right hand.

"Meneer Trols."

He started at the loudness of his own voice in that chamber of death.

The person thus summoned came hurrying up. He passed beyond the curtain, and appeared in the sanctum, his face lighted by a look of expectation he was striving to

restrain. Hendrik was standing by the table where lay his father's corpse.

"Mynheer Trols," he began nervously, "something terrible has happened. Something very terrible indeed."

"Good God, sir, the master!" cried the clerk, running round to the figure in the chair.

"Do not interrupt me," fired up Hendrik angrily. "Yes, something has happened to my father——"

"He is dead!" cried the clerk, unheeding. He had lifted the fallen head, and was striving to retain it in his arms.

"Hush, you fool!" burst out Hendrik fiercely. "Do you want the whole office to hear you? Don't you see it's far worse for me than for you, and I don't go on like that. It's my father. Be a man. D—— me, what a fool you are!"

For the clerk was striving in vain to control the workings of his face. The old fellow was crying.

"Go back into the office, as soon as you're fit to," said Hendrik contemptuously, "and say that Mynheer has been taken ill, and that I have gone home with him. But first tell one of the men to run for a cab, and then you and I will lift in—him. I don't want it to be known he died in the office. Do you understand? It will be given out that he died at home."

"Yes," said Trols, speaking as a man in a maze. "But why put it so? If——"

"You understand me, Mynheer Trols," interrupted Hendrik. "Please to order the cab."

When the clerk returned from this mission, he found young Lossell sitting at his own desk, with his back turned to—that thing—on the table.

"I will tell you, Mynheer Trols," said Hendrik, "why I wish to return home with—with my father. There is no reason why the day's business should be disturbed. In fact, it can't be, as you know. Not to-day, of all days. The



*Jeannette* sails this evening, and she must take our cargo with her. It is a matter of forty thousand florins. I can't shut up the office to-day."

"But, sir," stammered the head clerk, "I believe that Mynheer had just spoken of countermanding the consignment. He had heard bad accounts of the firm in Copenhagen. And even if it were not so, would it not be better, in the face of so appalling a catastrophe——"

"Not a word more," interrupted Hendrik haughtily. "Remember, if you please, Mynheer Trols, that I am the head of 'Volderdoes Zonen' now."

"What will become of us?" said Trols to himself, as he went back to his desk, after having aided his young master and obeyed all his commands. "A boy of nineteen! He can't be the chief, whatever he may say. He isn't even of age, nor will he be for the next four years. I wonder whether I am right in executing this order. Well, I can't help it. I suppose I must. But common decency would have shut up the place for the day."

And so young Hendrik inaugurated his reign. It may be a satisfaction to the reader who likes to know everything to be told that the Copenhagen house failed in the course of a month or two, so that the little job above mentioned cost Volderdoes Zonen the sum of thirty-seven thousand four hundred florins and ninety-three cents.

"And now, mother," said Hendrik, "let us see how matters stand. You may as well call in Huib, and we can all talk it over together."

They were sitting lugubriously facing each other by the dying dining-room fire. The remnants of dinner—an untouched dessert—stood on the table, under the dim light of a lamp which left three-quarters of the room in mysterious gloom. The meal had been a silent one, and Hubert had escaped from it to his own room as soon as possible. Hu-

bert was frightened and saddened by his father's sudden death. His was a gentle nature ; and he attached himself to his surroundings.

Hendrik got up, as his mother left the room, and stationed himself in front of the fireplace. He shuddered slightly as he stared into the darkness of the dreary distance.

Over the whole house hung that incomprehensible atmosphere of death, which lights up the monotony of existence with a sudden glare of false electric light, bringing out in lines of unexpected nakedness the littleness of daily wants and duties and throwing into full relief the reality of our turbulent consciousness against the great still shadow of the beyond.

"I am alive," said Hendrik to himself, not in so many words, but in a thought he was unconscious of thinking. He had been feeling it thus to himself all day. He rang the bell.

"Is there a fire in my mother's room?" he asked.

"No," said the servant; they had forgotten to light it. The servants sat huddled together in the kitchen, describing to each other all the corpses they had ever seen, with comments upon their greater or lesser beauty and upon the ravages caused by various diseases. The cook had occasioned a little unpleasant feeling by the statement that she had owned an aunt the cost of whose funeral had amounted to over a hundred florins. To this poetic license the others had taken exception, even when the items, as described, had been carefully totted up by the butler, and their voices had risen for a moment in indignant discussion, only to be suddenly hushed into whispers of mutual disparagement, when somebody recalled the fact that their master was lying "barely cold" upstairs.

The pretty housemaid rubbed her warm arm approvingly with one rough little hand. And the butler said sententiously that it was a good thing the dead had to leave their

money behind them, and he dared say that Mevrouw would keep up everything just as it was. They all looked at each other. That was an interesting subject, and it caused them to forget the cook's ostentatious relative. They were discussing probabilities when the dining-room bell rang.

"Bring a couple more lamps, then; we shall stay here," said Hendrik to the butler. "Commanding like a king," remarked the latter gentleman on his way downstairs. It was true that the nineteen-year-old son of the house had at once assumed an air of proprietorship. He felt that he was become the head of the family as well as of the firm. And without noticing the change himself he had allowed his voice and manner to take a shade of authority in consequence.

Yesterday, you see—whatever he might think he merited—he knew that he was of very little importance to anyone but himself, while to-day—why, to-day he was almost as important as his father had been yesterday—had been this morning. His father! who had always seemed to him the ideal of a social magnate, whose will governed as many inferior wills as that of the colonel of a regiment, and with far more unlimited power.

He was a minor, of course, but he had not the slightest doubt that he would immediately obtain letters of dispensation. Who else could manage the business but he? He was quite confident that he could manage the business. That was the great weakness in his strength, his overweening self-assurance, and it was the chief cause of the many misfortunes which befell him in his after-life.

When his mother came back with her other son, she found the lamps distributed over the room as was customary on the occasion of a dinner-party. The festive impression thus effected struck unpleasantly on her freshly-widowed heart. It called up painful recollections of her last conversation with her husband that morning, and of the

invitations for next Tuesday which had already been sent round.

"Why all these lights?" she asked.

"I hate a half-light," answered Hendrik abruptly. "What do you care, mother? There'll be money enough to pay for a little extra lamp-oil, I should think."

"Papa wouldn't understand, if he came in," interposed Hubert. "The room never looks like that."

Hendrik glanced scornfully at his twin-brother. "I thought you knew our father is dead," he said. "It's no use speculating on what he would do if he wasn't."

"I know he is dead," replied Hubert quickly. "But he is barely dead, Henk." And again the tears gathered in his eyes.

Hendrik vouchsafed no answer. He drew a chair forward for his mother, and then said abruptly: "Mother, here are father's keys." And he threw them down on the white table-cloth. In his nervousness he threw them more violently than he had intended. They struck against a wine-glass, and broke it.

"Oh, Hendrik!" expostulated his mother, "one of your grandfather's set!"

"Not *my* grandfather's," replied Hendrik. "That's where the difference comes in. These social courtesies are all very pretty, but when it comes to legal documents you soon find out that your stepbrother's grandfather never was yours. We shall have to distinguish henceforth between Elias and ourselves."

"Not as regards these matters," said his mother. She did not say what matters, but they understood each other perfectly.

"In these matters, and in all others. And therefore the sooner we know exactly how we stand, the better. I shall go down to the office to-morrow as usual, and Trols must sign till I can get the proper authorization. It's a good thing he is empowered to sign for the firm."

"Couldn't you stay at home till after the funeral?" queried his mother.

"Yes, if they shut up the 'Exchange' till then," sneered the new head of the house. "Now, mother, there are the keys, as I said, and the best thing we can do is to look over my father's papers. It's no use waiting till you feel inclined, for you won't feel any inclineder to-morrow than to-day."

"I did not say I did not feel inclined," said Judith.

"Hubert, you take one lamp, and I'll take another," Hendrik continued, suiting the action to the word. And so they passed together, the three of them, into the dead man's room.

The dead man's room does not die with him. On the contrary, it becomes far more vividly, far more painfully alive than it was before his death. It seems to be breathing, almost audibly, and as you stand there, lamp in hand, amid the twilight, all its thousand and one little trifling objects seem to be opening their new-found eyes and staring gloomily at you. And when your glance falls unexpectedly on the dead man's hat and gloves, you realize, as you never realized before, that he is dead.

Judith Lossell took up a woollen comforter, which she had only recently knitted for her husband. She had noticed that morning that he had neglected to put it on, and she had felt a twinge of displeasure at the thought of his holding her gift in such light esteem. Now, as she took it meditatively in her hands, a couple of tears dropped slowly on the wrap.

"Lift up your lamp, so I can see, Huib," said Hendrik.

He had set down his own and was trying the keys on his father's private "Chatwood."

The safe contained two compartments, the one, with a second door, being reserved for stock, while in the other lay all important documents, not actually convertible into

ready money. It was these that Hendrik drew out, leaving the inner division untouched.

"We can't stop here," he said, "it's too cold. Mother, would you mind carrying my lamp?"

"Oh no, not here," said Hubert, in a whisper.

They went back to the dining-room. "Lock the door, Hubert," said Hendrik, and he pushed away the dessert things to make a clear space for the bundle he had brought with him. His mother came to the rescue of her crockery, as Hendrik flung down the papers with a thud in a stream over the white table-cloth. And then they gathered around, and watched, the while he sorted them. Presently a hungry flash passed through his eyes. It was gone in an instant. "This is it," he said, as he laid down the paper he had just taken up.

It was the will.

He began reading it rapidly, the others waiting impatiently meanwhile. Divested of its legal preamble it was very short indeed.

"My eldest son Elias being otherwise provided for," said the testator, "I bequeath to him only that legal portion of which I could not deprive him if I would, while I appoint my twin sons, his half-brothers, Hendrik and Hubert, heirs of all other property of which I die possessed."

In Holland a parent cannot entirely disinherit his or her child, but must leave it a fraction of the inheritance.

Hendrik laid down the document. "That was the best arrangement father could make," he said with a complacent smile. "What's the use of leaving money to a half-witted creature like Elias, who already has his mother's money probably, besides? You and I must be Volderdoes Zonen, henceforth, Huib."

"But you haven't found out about Elias's money yet," said Hubert quietly.

"Oh, that's his mother's fortune, of course, which has



been invested in Government securities during his minority. The law arranges all that, Hubert."

"I know," said Hubert, without any sign of impatience.

"Wait till you see," interposed Judith. She recalled several dark threats of her husband's, and her heart was not at rest.

"Find Papa's marriage-settlement," suggested Hubert. He often thought, while Hendrik was busy.

"Here is yours, mother," said Hendrik, fumbling among the papers.

"I know," answered Judith angrily. "It's the other woman's you want."

They found it. It was a lengthy document, a marriage-settlement in *propria forma*. It settled the sum of one hundred thousand florins on Hendrik Lossell's first wife, and it tied down all the money she would ever possess to herself and her heirs for ever. The money was tied down as tight as family pride can tie.

"Of course," said Hendrik, "and quite right too. One hundred thousand florins at her marriage. The only question which now remains to be answered is this: What did old Elias Volderdoes's death add on to that original sum?"

"No trifle probably," remarked Judith.

"We shall hardly find an answer to that here," said Hendrik, pushing the various documents apart with his hand.

But they did. For they found a copy of old Elias's will. By-the-bye, all these papers were copies. Dutch law recognizes no wills except such as are deposited in the hands of the attorneys, who are Government officials.

And these were the contents of old Elias's will.

The old gentleman disinherited his daughter, thereby setting the example which that daughter's husband afterwards followed with regard to their child. He decreed that the large sum of which he could not deprive her was to be

taken from the money which he had invested in the funds, and this sum, according to the marriage-settlements, would pass to her children at her death.

And then he came to the capital which was invested in the business. This capital had been divided, shortly before the old man's death, into one hundred shares of ten thousand florins each. Of these shares five only had been allotted to Hendrik Lossell, while the remaining ninety-five had remained the property of Elias Volderdoes, the head of the firm.

These ninety-five shares the old gentleman now left to his grandchild and godson Elias, with the express stipulation that they were forthwith to be registered in his name. And furthermore it was expressly directed that, if the boy's mother were to die while he was under age, all profits resulting from these shares were yearly to be invested to the said boy's advantage, after deduction of fifteen per cent. by the father. The money was to remain thus tied up, the testator went on to say, as long as the child was under guardianship or curatorship of any kind, and alterations could only be made, when he was able to make them of his own free will.

Such, in brief, were the contents of this singular document, when divested of all technicalities and superfluities. The testator had known, when he made these restrictions, that his daughter, already ailing and near death, would have no other offspring than Elias. He had centred all his hope on this his only male descendant. For his son-in-law, the penniless robber of his daughter's heart, he had never felt any very great affection, but other near relations he had none, and, if Elias died, well, then there would be nothing left worth caring for, and Elias's father might as well have the money as anyone else.

But the old man did not believe that Elias would die. He had his little private superstitions, and he believed in the future of Volderdoes Zonen with Elias at their head.

The result, then, of old Volderdoes's will, in connection with the previous marriage contract, was this, that every penny of the vast Volderdoes property was settled on Elias Lossell, and that Elias's father had only enjoyed the interest on his wife's legal portion and the fifteen per cent. on Elias's dividends during the years between Margaretha's death and Elias's twentieth birthday. After that birthday even this source of revenue had failed, as all moneys derived from the minor's property must thenceforth be allowed to accumulate, according to the requirements of Dutch law.

This, however, was not the worst. The worst was undoubtedly that the capital of the firm had been so securely tied down for Elias that there was no getting it loose, unless he himself consented to unfasten it. Any attempt to fictitiously increase that capital—an expedient of very doubtful efficacy—was rendered impossible by the terms of the original agreement.

I do not know whether I have given the exact stipulations, as they ought to have been stated, for, of course, I have never seen the original documents, which are at the notary's, nor the authenticated copies, which are in the hands of the Lossell family, but I believe that all I have repeated here is substantially accurate, and no doubt it will be found sufficient for the requirements of this story of Elias's fortunes.

Young Hendrik sat reading the transcript of Elias's grandfather's will with increasing rapidity and heightening colour. When he came to the term "guardianship or curatorship," a subdued exclamation broke from him, which need not here be repeated. He threw the paper across to his mother.

"Every penny is Elias's!" he burst out wildly. "Great Heaven, that blind idiot is the head of the firm!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### NO THOROUGHFARE, AND THE WAY OUT.

“POOR Elias!” said Hubert.

Perhaps he had never realized so much as at that moment what an immense injury he had unwittingly done his stepbrother.

And yet he often remembered. It would not be correct to say that he always did so, nor that the recollection saddened his entire life. But it sobered it, casting a shadow at times over its most brilliant sunshine. It was, if you can pardon the simile, like a hollow tooth in his heart, and when he bit on it he pulled a face. He hardly liked to be thrown much in company with Elias. For Elias reminded him of the tooth.

“Poor you!” retorted Hendrik. “Pity yourself and me, if you want to waste pity on anyone. Or shall we still speak of ‘dear Grandpapa,’ when we remember the old gentleman up there?” He jerked his head in the direction of the great portrait of Elias Volderdoes, which smiled down from the wall with its air of sly pomposity.

There came a knock at the dining-room door.

“Who’s there?” cried Hendrik impatiently, sweeping his arm over the scattered papers. “Go and be hanged! You can’t come in.”

Hubert went to the door. It was the man-servant, come to clear away.

Hendrik passed out to him. “The notary must be sent for at once,” he said. “And Mynheer Alers, also. You know, my friend, the lawyer. He had better come after the

notary is gone. Ask him to step round in half an hour, Mulder."

He went back to the others.

"And yet, I suppose it is only fair," said Hubert. "The firm was originally Volderdoes, and Elias is the only one of us who has any Volderdoes blood in his veins."

"You are a child, Hubert," cried his brother, "and a stupid one. It is not fair. Everyone had a right to expect that, after a quarter of a century of such unceasing work, my father would have bought out any share his first wife had in the business. And so he would have, over and over again, but for this blackguardly clause. He has been working all the time, like a horse, merely to heap up hundreds of thousands of florins for an idiot to whom they are not of the slightest use. I can't imagine what made him keep at it so hard, under the circumstances, unless it was because he couldn't do things otherwise than well. He was a splendid man of business, was my father. I wish you and I may be like him."

It was his tribute of esteem to his dead father's memory. And, coming from a young gentleman of his wisdom and self-respect, it was not a little thing.

"After all," he added presently, "Papa must have left a lot of money behind him. I dare say there will be no difficulty there. But what is to become of Volderdoes Zonen Providence alone can tell."

His voice faltered with sincere emotion over the final words.

Yet another disappointment awaited Judith Lossell and her sons. It could not be long before they made the discovery that the Town Councillor had not left a large fortune behind him. And, truly, young Hendrik was deserving of pity, as he fell from one disclosure to another. Soon the whole truth lay bare before him, and he must face it as best he could.

The very fact of his having been bound down to what he must consider perpetual poverty had driven the merchant into repeated speculation as the one means of achieving a fortune. During the short period of his marriage his income had been very large, and even after his wife's death, up to Elias's twentieth year, it had remained considerable, although his share of the great profits of the firm had then become restricted to the dividends on his own five shares and the fifteen per cent. allotted him on his son's large revenue. With the money he had been enabled to lay on one side he had speculated on the Stock Exchange—"for my children's sake," he told himself, but not with the success so worthy an object merited. Of late, especially, when his income had so much decreased, his attempts to make good the deficit had proved singularly unfortunate, and when he died, stricken down suddenly, and still in the prime of life, he left liabilities which far exceeded the value of his personal estate. The great firm of Volderdoes Zouen was as wealthy and prosperous as ever, but its head was practically insolvent.

The merchant, it must be said to his honour, had been scrupulously upright in the administration of his son's fortune. How easy it would have been for him to slur over accounts, nay, actually to ignore them. But, once having bound himself down to this contract by which he accepted the position of acting partner on five shares and fifteen per cent. of all remaining net profits, with his son as sleeping partner and owner of the whole business, he had drawn up his annual accounts as if a board of directors were waiting to audit them. While practically poor himself, he had heaped up his son's great fortune with consistent accuracy. It lay there, gradually swelling to a total such as is rarely met with in Holland; it lay useless, and, as long as Elias lived, there it must lie. Hendrik Lossell's commercial integrity accepted the terrible fact as inevitable. It might cause him to wish at times for the death of the hopeless



owner, but he had never taken any steps by which his father-in-law's wishes might be set aside.

And yet, when his son came of age, he could easily have attempted some adjustment of his difficulties. He had shrunk from doing so. Perhaps he had remained for some time hesitating and uncertain, and on that very account had delayed the appointment of a curator. Perhaps he had preferred to leave the whole matter to his heirs, presuming that they would be less scrupulous than he.

However this might be, he had lived up to his standard of honour; and, when he was suddenly struck down, the enormous fortune of Elias was found intact in the hands of the family notary, in so far as it was not already secured in Dutch consols or in the shares of the firm. He had brought it to the above-mentioned functionary a few days before his death. It was as if he no longer trusted himself, after all these faithful years, to have it lying ready for immediate use. For, indeed, he might easily have used it, if only as security.

When young Hendrik, with white face and smarting eyes, walked into his father's deserted room, and drew forth the second key and opened the inner division of the safe, he found it empty.

He went up to his mother's bedroom and knocked at the door.

"You can't come in, Hendrik."

"But I must, mother."

"You can't. I have the dressmaker with me."

"Send her away, somewhere, anywhere. I must come in"—this in French, which the dressmaker understood perfectly. "Tell her to go downstairs and make dresses for the servants. All the servants must go into mourning. I should think so. Il y a de quoi."

"Je ne travaille pas pour la domesticité, Madame," said the dressmaker inside, indignantly, wishing to show that

she also could speak the language of fashion and fashions, as well as young gentlemen who dealt in tea.

"I know, I know, my good creature," replied Judith wearily. "It's only that he wants to come in. You might as well take that bodice into the next room and alter the tucker. He will only be a minute, I dare say."

"I could do it better at home," said the dressmaker peevishly.

"I can't help it," replied the mistress of the house. "You see he says he wants to come in. And I suppose he must." All her strength seemed to have gone out of her. She was rapidly learning to "knuckle under" to her son.

At this juncture Hendrik rattled the door lock. He was getting tired of waiting.

"Renvoyez-la," he cried.

The dressmaker came out, casting annihilating glances at the young tyrant. They did not annihilate him, however, because he did not see them. He rushed past her, at a bound, and into his mother's presence.

"Mother!" he cried. "This is no time for fooling. Borlett will be here in ten minutes, and I must know what to say to him. My father's left nothing but debts. And who's to pay them? The only thing we can do is to repudiate the inheritance at once."

Judith Lossell turned very pale. All the pride of this wife and daughter of merchants rose up in terrified protest. Such disgrace was impossible. Who could lift up his head again after it?

"Refuse to pay the debts!" she stammered. "Hendrik, what can you be thinking of? Whatever happens, we could never sink as low as that."

"We shall have to," said Hendrik sullenly.

The poor woman turned from one falling pillar and clutched feebly at another.

"Hubert would never allow it," she said.

"Hubert! Hubert!" cried Hendrik in a towering rage.

"And who is Hubert, and what is Hubert, pray, to allow or disallow? Will he make money for us out of pebbles, with his sentimental airs and superior refinement? I can cry enough, if you like, and if you think crying will do any good. Hubert, indeed! As if Hubert had an inkling of an idea what this ignominy means to me." He checked himself. His voice sank. He looked quite old and skinny and careworn, this boy of nineteen.

"I only meant that it cannot be," protested Judith faintly. "It is too terrible."

"Look here, mother," said Hendrik fiercely, "it is terrible, and it is absurd at the same time. But for us it is not funny, only hideous. Yet it is ludicrous, none the less, with the business one of the finest in Holland. It means giving over our family secrets to be the laughing-stock of every club or exchange in the country. But it can't be helped. At least, I see no way to avoid it, and I've been thinking over the matter till I believe my hair is turning gray. There's some twenty thousand florins still in various securities, and there's the fifty thousand of the firm, that's seventy. And there's a hundred thousand owing to the brokers after this fresh fall in North American Railways, which ought to be paid in forty-eight hours. The best thing is for me just simply to go and tell them that there will be an inventory, and that they must get what they can out of the property. The house, it appears, is Elias's. I dare say they'll be civil to me when I explain."

He choked over the words, but set his face hard.

"You see, you must," he went on. "We're minors. You're guardian. They'll come and ask you to pay. And you"—another gulp—"can't. What'll you say, then, mother?"

He looked at her for a moment, sitting there in her half-finished widow's dress. Then he fixed his eyes on the floor. And then he lifted them again to her face. She did not speak. What should she say?

And then suddenly he threw his arms round her neck and burst into tears. He was only nineteen. This was very different from being lord of "Volderdoes Zonen," or even only a merchant princelet and heir-apparent. He was utterly broken down and ashamed.

"And Elias's millions!" he said fiercely, after a moment, between his sobs. His voice grew hideous with hate.

"Yes, he could save us," answered his mother eagerly, "and why not, Henk? I cannot understand it. He is of age. He is not under anyone's control now. Can't he do as he likes with his money?"

"I suppose so," faltered Hendrik.

"Then why can he not spend it as we advise him to?"

Hendrik hesitated. A gleam of hope, and more than hope, played about his cunning little face.

"It all depends," he said slowly, "whether Elias is crazy or not."

And then a long silence fell upon them.

## CHAPTER XV.

### HENDRIK'S TEMPTATION.

"THERE is one way out, of course," said Alers. "As you probably know, even better than I."

"And which is that?" asked Hendrik, without looking at his friend.

"Your step-brother."

Alers was a young Koopstader, a few years older than Losseil. All the Koopstaders being connected by some bond of marriage, whether in this century or the last, there was a kind of relationship between these two young men also, but neither of them had as yet reached a sufficiently eminent position in the world for the other to remember that they were cousins. The world is full of these one-sided kinships, which never attain to mutual recognition, because they are always either forgotten by both equals or ignored by one superior, and in Koopstad especially there was not much honour to be obtained by the casual mention of "my cousin the Burgomaster," because the Burgomaster was everybody else's cousin also, at least from the point of view of the everybody else.

Thomas Alers had enjoyed the advantages of a university education, and had recently settled down in his native city as an advocate, practising in the courts of law. He was a sharp young man. By a sharp young man is very often meant a young man whose moral side is blunt, so blunt that the money-making, pushing side comes out cute per contrast. It would be premature to say that Alers was that kind of sharp young man.

As yet he had little to do, but great prospects. The prospects were visible to his mind's far-seeing eye; the smallness of his present occupations to the most near-sighted busybody in Koopstad.

Busybodies, however—this by the way—are never near-sighted, although they almost invariably squint.

"Elias Crœsus or the Crœsus Elias," the young lawyer continued, playing carelessly with his stick. "Of this Crœsus it may also be said that you can call no man happy until he is dead, that is to say, the Crœsus. You understand? No? Well, it's hardly worth thinking out. All the same, it's a great nuisance for you, Lossell, that Hubert didn't give that pot a harder push."

"Once for all, none of that," burst out Hendrik with an indignation which seemed almost disproportionate. "It's useless. And it's disgusting. I won't hear it. I've got enough to do with my own thoughts, worse luck."

"Tut, tut," said the other coolly. "It's no affair of mine. And even you can't be more willing than I to do homage to the new head of the house, Elias the Second—or is it Third? I was thinking of going out to him this afternoon and asking him to let me have some of your law-business. I'd do it cheaper than your father's man."

"Nonsense," cried Hendrik, more indignantly still. "You know perfectly well that Elias isn't head of the firm, and never could be. It's bad enough, as it is, that he should be sleeping partner at all. You needn't make it worse!"

"Sleeping owner, you mean," retorted Thomas lazily. "I don't know, I'm sure, who's the firm, if he is not."

"The firm!" stuttered Hendrik. "There is none. I mean I shall—I ought to—what are you insinuating, Alers? What do you want? Do you advise me to kill Elias as the shortest means of inheriting his wealth?"

The lawyer started to his feet. His whole manner



changed in a moment. "Don't father your thoughts on me," he said very angrily. "I never said, or hinted, or dreamed of, anything so atrocious. And if you choose to sit hatching monstrosities, remember the original bad egg was your own, if you please. How dare you suggest to me, Hendrik, that I am to blame for the abominations of your thoughts?"

"I fancied it was all in your day's work to suspect everyone of thinking abominations," answered Hendrik, somewhat alarmed. "You've often said so. And, besides, you declared just now that my brother supplied me with the only means out of the difficulty. What else did you allude to?"

"You are too agitated to discuss any subject sensibly," said Thomas Alers. "If you will sit down, and listen calmly, well and good. If not, I would rather take leave of you for the present. There's a client coming to see me to-morrow morning," he added proudly, "and I have a number of papers to look over for him still."

Hendrik threw himself violently into a corner of the sofa, and sat there the picture of sullen impatience.

"The last thing any reasonable being would suggest," the young advocate went on, "would be that you or anyone else should in any way injure your unfortunate step-brother. On the contrary, your only way out of the difficulties in which you find yourself is to treat him with all due affection and regard. He is a very important personage now. The most important in all Koopstad, I should almost venture to say. Except, perhaps, my cousin, the Burgomaster." Alers was poor. His mother had married beneath her. He liked to allude to his mother's relations.

"He is an idiot," said Hendrik, "and ought to be under proper guardianship."

"He is blind, poor fellow," replied Alers. "And he is deaf. His memory, I have often heard from you, is weak, and he thinks slowly. Does that constitute idiocy?"

"You know nothing about him," said Hendrik irritably. "You have never even seen him, I believe."

"I know this," retorted Alers imperturbably, "that your father was never so incensed as when anyone dared to suggest that his eldest son was not in full possession of his senses, such as they were."

"He is an idiot, all the same," repeated Hendrik.

"If that is true, I am very sorry for you, for then there seems to me to be no way out of your difficulty at all."

Hendrik sat up and stared at him. "What do you mean?" he said.

"Surely it is very simple, Lossell. You are not nearly as clear-headed a man of business as I thought you. By the terms of the old gentleman's testament the situation is to remain unaltered until Elias can alter it of his own free will. Now, if his mind is deranged, he has got no free will of his own, and he must accordingly be placed under a 'curator.'"

"I have thought of that," said Hendrik. "The will expressly says 'guardians or curators.' I should in any case be the one trustee, and Hubert would probably be the other."

"Probably, but it is by no means certain. In fact, from a few words that Borlett, your father's notary, dropped yesterday, I fancy he would stir up the two other members of the family council to propose a different trustee to the *juge de paix*. Don't forget that you two step-brothers are his heirs, and that Elias has distant cousins enough on the Volderdoes side. The judges don't, as a rule, look after the interests of such unfortunates over-zealously, but this property is large enough to attract the attention of all Koopstad, and, even if you should be the sole trustees, you will find public opinion watches your doings pretty sharply."

"I don't want to do anything wrong," interposed Hendrik.

"Of course not, but you will find it difficult to do anything at all, once you get a 'curatela' instituted. We needn't go into law talk just now. But you will soon perceive, I can tell you, that your crazy brother's money would be immovably fixed in the business and on the 'Great Book of the National Debt,' and there it could go on uselessly accumulating as it has done hitherto."

"Then it must accumulate. I can't help it."

"On the other hand, the law recognizes no gradations between absolute incapacity and entire responsibility. It can't do so. A man is either incapable of spending one farthing on lollipops, or fit to look after a business involving a couple of millions. There is no alternative. And if a man isn't mad, he is sane."

"You want me to say that Elias isn't an idiot," spake Hendrik. "Very well; he isn't. He is a man of remarkable intelligence. He is a Sophocles—what d'ye call 'im?—Socrates, I mean."

"No, he is not, you fool," hissed his friend in swift, sharp accents, angry for the first time, "and he needn't be, as I tell you. He needn't even be as clever a creature as you are. It's quite sufficient for him to be hovering on the border, as long as he's hovering on the proper side."

"And why?" asked Hendrik. He was not offended. I think it was one of the worst traits in a character not otherwise evil that insult did not annoy him. "For him, I grant it you. But not for us. If the business be liquidated, as I suppose it must be, and all this money be put into Elias's foolish hands, he will make ducks and drakes of it in a month."

The lawyer turned full upon his friend. "Is it that you really can't understand me, or is it that you won't?" he asked.

The other shifted uneasily on his seat.

"Hum," said Alers, and again, for a few moments, he

became engrossed in the points of his boots and the tip of his cane.

"You might, at any rate, speak plainly when you do speak," remarked Hendrik presently.

"I don't speak. I have no wish to speak unless I'm asked," was the quick reply.

"Well, I ask you," said Lossell humbly.

"Then this is all I have to say. I make no doubt you are saying it to yourself. Avoid by all means in your power the appointment of guardians for Elias, even if those guardians be your brother and yourself. Prove to the outer world that, although afflicted in the loss of his physical senses, he has retained the clear use of his brain and is quite able to look after his own interests."

"And then?" asked Hendrik, his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"You press me unduly. The interests of brothers surely should have much in common."

"And when they clash?"

"It seems to me the stronger brain should conquer."

Another pause. A longer one this time. Then said Hendrik: "Alers, what makes you say these things? What makes you care to say them?"

"I?" replied the other lightly, as he rose to go. "Philanthropy! My affection for you, and my love of well-doing! What else?"

"Oh, nothing else," said Hendrik.

But the lawyer did not quite want to leave him under that impression—if he really had it.

"And, of course, it is an advantage to me to have you as a friend. You will be a rich man some day, Lossell, a rich man soon, I fancy, for you are going to be head of the great firm. After all, Elias hasn't been brought up to business-habits, and in his own advantage, as well as in yours, he will have to make over to you what is yours by right. And

when you are a rich man, you will want a professional adviser. I think you want one already. It's a pleasant thing to be a rich man. The next best thing is to be a rich man's friend. Ta, ta."

"I haven't got any money to buy it up," burst out Lossell.

The other paused in the doorway.

"What price does Elias ask?" he said. "You don't know yet? Ah, I thought so. Well, a good deal will depend upon that. Tell me, when you know. Or don't; just as you prefer. It's no business of anybody's, as far as I can see. Quite a family arrangement. Good-night."

Left alone, Hendrik remained for a long time without moving, huddled up in his corner of the sofa, his eyes fixed intently on some spot they did not see. He had understood his friend perfectly.

Vague conceptions which had been floating in his own brain had received definite form and substance. And mistaken impressions had been corrected. He had had a confused idea that Elias might be made harmless by being declared insane, and that then the man who administered his fortune for him, would be allowed to use it, as far as was necessary, for the welfare of the whole family. It had not occurred to him, at least not in that concise form, that it would be far simpler and more efficacious to let his step-brother give his money, instead of taking it away from him. But at the first hint in that direction, he had seen the whole path clear before him at once. Nothing would be easier, if Elias were left master of himself, than to prove to him that expediency or honesty or any other motive which came handy required him to cede the business to his brothers. He would make a present of it to them; nay, still better, he would sell it to them for an old glove. A new deed must be drawn up, by which Elias, of his own free will, liberated the acting partners from the yoke which old Volderdoes had

fastened on their necks. The shares must be redistributed, Elias selling the larger part of them to his step-brothers at a nominal price, and the profits, also, must be restored to the people who worked for them.

What could be fairer, if you came to think of it? Elias would be quite rich enough, even if he lost this great income from the business to which he had practically no right. Vested interests? Capital? Ah, vested interests always look unjust when it's another man that they're vested in. And it appeared to Hendrik, that Elias had already drawn far more than he deserved from these vested interests of his. "Whose the labour is, his should the profits be," he said to himself. He did not say it to his employés. What would Hubert think? There might be a slight difficulty there, but hardly a very serious one. Nothing could be done till Hendrik had obtained the dispensation he hoped for, and then it was he who would have to do everything. Hubert would be altogether a secondary person. And it would be easy to find a notary who was more obliging than Borlett.

Ouf! It seemed very simple. And really very fair. Were those not the words which constantly returned to his thoughts? Why did they return so constantly, and why did he not simply accept them, and repose in them, so to say? Why need he repeat thus over and over again: And really very fair? Of course it was fair. Quite fair. Was it not fair?

Must a dead man, then, dead a quarter of a century ago, rule the world by the eternal law of his injustice? And had not this man himself indicated the way of escape? Elias should decide when he came of age. Elias was of age. Let him decide.

He put on his hat, and went out.

Where to, he did not know. He thought the air would do him good. It had been his nightly pleasure, when the



day's work was over, to loiter down the gaslit streets of Koopstad, with some equally exquisite friend, the delight of all beholders, on his way to the theatre or the music-hall. To-night he shrank from the far din of the populous streets. It seemed to him as if everybody in Koopstad knew of his dilemma, and could read his thoughts. He crept away, and slunk down back streets, towards the quays, and, almost before he heeded whither he was going, he found that his accustomed steps had brought him to the warehouse-door.

He rang the door-keeper's bell, again scarcely knowing why. As he was there, he might as well go in for a moment, and see that all was right.

He passed by the old concierge, with a hurried recognition, and walked swiftly down the corridor towards his father's private room. He had never yet been in it by evening. The father would sometimes return to his office after dinner. He had not required this of his son.

Was it this feeling of singularity, or some strange awe of night that made him hesitate on the threshold? What is it that causes the dead to be nearest to us at night-time, calling them up out of the darkness into which they sank from our sight? Do they really revisit their earthly haunts in those still hours only, when they need not fear the sunlight which to them is an eternal terror and regret? When we come suddenly into the dark room, which was theirs before they left us, we feel their breath fall cold upon our faces, and, as we turn rapidly to look behind us from the newly-lighted candle, we catch a glimpse of the shadow of their shadow flitting away into the widening light.

Young Hendrik Lossell had never felt his dead father so near to him as now when he stood a moment irresolute in the dark passage outside that closed door.

He felt for his matches, and struck a light. And then he threw open the door and stumbled forward into the room.

It was already lighted—dimly—by a movable gas-lamp which stood on the mantelpiece.

Hendrik threw away his match with an exclamation of surprise. His brother Hubert was sitting motionless in a corner of the room.

"You here!" he cried. "What in the name of goodness——"

"Hush," said Hubert—almost solemnly.

Hendrik laughed—a nervous laugh. He went round to his brother. "I can't imagine what you are after, Huib," he said.

Hubert looked up at him, and Hendrik saw that his face was white. "What are *you* after?" said Hubert.

"I?" stammered Hendrik, at a loss. "I came to see——" Again Hubert stopped him.

"You came because you were called," he said. "I knew you were coming. I knew it just when you opened the door. Father had told me."

"Father!" cried Hendrik, almost with a scream. "Hubert, you are——" The other started up and flung his hand on his brother's mouth. "Still," he cried. "He will hear you. For God's sake, be still."

"Don't be vexed with me," Hubert went on hurriedly. "I came here, I don't quite know why. I couldn't stop indoors, so I ran out, and my footsteps brought me here. I thought I should like to be quite alone in this place once in a way and think of my father's working and—and dying here. And I got Peter to let me in. Of course the place reminds one of father more than any other. And—and, Henk,"—his voice dropped to a whisper; he pointed with one hand—"that's, that's his chair."

"I know that, surely," said Hendrik impatiently, but trembling from head to foot as he cast a frightened glance towards the round leather-cushioned armchair before the immense "bureau ministre" in the middle of the room. On the table the blotter lay, neatly closed; a number of petty,

well-known objects, penholders, a large seal, a pair of scissors, were arranged in tidy rows, waiting for the hand that had used them so often. Its shadow still seemed to hover over them. The gas-lamp now burning on the mantelpiece had been invariably used by the merchant on his desk when he required light.

"I've seen him sitting in it day after day," said Hendrik. Something in his brother's nervous voice and awe-struck manner irritated and agitated him both in one.

"Ah, but I saw him sitting there to-night," whispered Hubert. "Don't stare at me like that, Hendrik. He was sitting very quietly, gazing at the table in front of him, sitting just as he used to sit. And after a few moments, he turned round and looked at me, and his face was dreadfully, unfathomably sad. And then I knew that you would come."

"Come away," cried Hendrik, pulling at his brother's arm, and trying to make his voice as loud as he could without raising it. "Come away immediately. It's horrible, Hubert, and I won't stay to hear any more of it."

"There is no more," said Hubert. "Why is it horrible? No, Hendrik, you must stay. For that is why you are come. Hendrik, we must save the old house. Do you hear me? And we must save our father's memory. There must not be a whisper against it in Koopstad, not a whisper. We must all take our share of the burden, and therefore Elias must take his. Elias must pay the debts, and he must support mother so that no one may know she has less money than formerly. He owes that to his father's memory, and we must tell him to do it. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes," said Hendrik, gasping for breath. "What more?"

"And *we* owe it to our father's memory to reverence our step-brother's misfortune, and to protect him from all injury and all insult. Not I only who—not I only, you also. He, on his side, will do his duty, as we bid him, and

we will do ours. It will be a bond, dear Hendrik, between us and him. And the thought that he has been enabled thus to help us will make his welfare sacred in our sight; will it not?"

"Yes," said Hendrik in a toneless voice.

"*He* hears us," continued Hubert, speaking slightly louder. He drew his brother towards him, and advanced a little nearer to the empty chair. "He hears us, I am sure of it, he, who always, through the long years of his untiring labor, held the cruel rights of his hapless son as a thing too holy to be touched. We will do like him. And we will ask nothing of Elias but what we know it is his duty to accord. We declare it, father, even as in thy presence. And if thou understand us, let that sadness die away forever from thy sight."

"Let us swear it, Henk," he added softly, after a moment's solemn pause. "Swear to save his memory by Elias's help, to maintain the house in its greatness by all powers at our command, and to further the welfare of Elias as if it were our own. Swear."

Hendrik clasped his brother's hand, and bent his head without speaking.

"We swear," said Hubert for them both. "So be it," he added. "So help us God Almighty. We have sworn. And now let us go and speak to Elias."

"It is too late to-night," began Hendrik feebly.

"No, no, it is not yet near nine. Let us get it over to-night, and then we can rest in peace. Better have it done to-night. There is yet time."

And without casting another look backwards into the dim, dreary office-room under its strange air of disturbed daylight, without a thought for the lamp left burning on the mantelpiece, Hubert fled down the passage followed by Hendrik.

The old Chinaman, left alone with the shaded light and the memory of the dead, winked hideously from the elevated

shrine whence he had presided for so many years over the fortunes of the great house of Volderdoes. Probably he was well content. For even he could not, with that power which is the common privilege only of dead saints and living devils, look far into the awful future, and foretell the bloody sequel of that night's solemn vow.

Old Peter was not sentimental. He came in a few minutes later and turned off the gas, with many grumblings at the recklessness of the young and laudations of his own vigilance. And before he turned the screw, his eyes fell on Hendrik's half-smoked cigar, which had been flung into the grate. And he extracted it carefully, and dusted it, and took it away with him into his lodge. And there he smoked it.

The two brothers found Johanna in the act of helping Elias to bed. In fact, she had just completed his toilet; and he was saying his prayers. They came in upon this, the maid having admitted them, and stood waiting till he had done. The words fell solemnly on the stillness, issuing from that cavern of darkness. They were few words and simple, such as any child may speak, strangely in contrast with the massive frame and powerful head of this man in the full bloom of a manly adolescence. He thanked God, as usual, for having given him Volderdoes Zonen to provide him with all that he needed. Hubert looked at Hendrik. Hendrik winced and closed his eyes.

And then he prayed for his father, forgetting that he was dead.

When he had done, Hubert went up and tried to speak to him, but his hand trembled, and Elias shrank back, as if in pain, from the agitated movement of his fingers. "You interpret for us, Johanna," said Hubert. "Tell him we are here. Remind him that papa is dead. Tell him that he is now very rich. That he has got a great deal of money. Does he understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Elias, with his bell-like voice. "Then, if I have got a lot of money, may the old man have his beef-tea?"

"He means an old man who comes here every morning," said Johanna. "There was none to-day."

"Say yes, yes," burst in Hendrik, as a man speaks when he breaks suddenly through restraint.

"Say yes," repeated Hubert, "but tell him we shall want some of his money, not much considering, for the maintenance of Volderdoes Zonen. Does he understand?"

"I understand," said Elias again. "If there were no Volderdoes Zonen, I should be very unhappy indeed."

"Then he wants it to continue to exist?"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Hendrik.

"Ask him, Johanna, if he wishes to do all he can that it should continue to do so?"

"But I can't do anything," said Elias, as soon as this was made plain to him. "I can't do anything." He sat up in bed. "What can I do?" he repeated excitedly.

Johanna soothed him. It was told him that he must give money to pay his father's debts, and a yearly sum to support his step-mother.

It might be questioned how much he understood of all this, but there could not be the slightest doubt of his eagerness to give to whoever wanted or ever asked his support. Had they asked him to divide a million florins between his brothers, he would unhesitatingly have trusted them and done as they required.

"No, no, no," said Hubert. "That is quite enough. Tell him that we will bring him the necessary papers to sign (he must make a cross) when they can be ready. I am sure Borlett will help us, Hendrik, in all this. And now tell him also, Johanna, that we thank him. Tell him that we have sworn to do all in our power to help and to protect him. Never mind if he understands it all. Tell him that



we love him ; he will understand that. And that we will be good brothers to him, by the help of God."

"I understand," said Elias after a pause. "Kiss me, Hubert. Kiss me, Hendrik. I am very sleepy. I think I should like to go to sleep."

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Johanna with the tears in her honest eyes.

"Nothing more ridiculous," Alers was repeating at the Club, "than the thesis that a man must be insane because he is blind, or deaf, or even both. It is outrageous. The law knows no guardianship of those who have lost the use of their organs of sense. The brain—ah, that is a different thing. Homer was blind. Galileo was blind—wasn't he? And so was Milton. And I'm sure that a great number of eminent men were deaf and dumb, only one doesn't remember their names. Now there's Elias Lossell, you were speaking of—or was I speaking of him? Well, it doesn't matter—I know the Lossells well. I can assure you Elias is no more idiotic than you or I. I don't say he is as intelligent—but there's a great difference. Now I don't pretend to be nearly as intelligent as you are, but I must object to being called more idiotic. I repeat, such a nature has naturally great disadvantages, but the law fortunately does not add to their number. And it would be outrageous not to allow a man to do what he liked with his own, simply because such a man was blind, and deaf and dumb. And Lossell's not even dumb."

"I certainly agree with you," said a quiet gentleman by the fireplace. "But is Lossell really only deaf and blind? I had always understood he was half-witted."

"Did you ever hear his father say anything of the kind?" asked Alers, turning on the speaker.

"No ; I hardly think so. But his brother certainly. Young Hendrik Lossell never speaks otherwise of him than as of a hopeless idiot."

"Young Hendrik is a capital fellow," rejoined Alers sententiously. "He is a great friend of mine. But he is young. And we young fellows are quick with our generalisations. Unless we are lawyers and weigh our words. A man is always an 'utter idiot' or 'awfully clever.' A woman is always either 'the most beautiful creature in the world' or 'altogether unfit to look at.' And besides, young Lossell is naturally a little jealous of his unfortunate step-brother, despite the latter's misfortune."

"I wonder how much money there is," said another man, a large, loose fellow, who had come lounging up with his hands in his pockets. "A lot of money anyway, I fancy."

"There is more money, I can tell you," replied the young lawyer with a great air of mysterious importance, "than often passes in this country from a father to his children. They are all rich, naturally, with such a business, but by far the richest of them, nevertheless, is the eldest, the deaf man Elias. I fancy Elias Lossell must be the richest man in Koopstad."

There was not one man in that whole smoking-room who did not consider money the supreme thing worth living and working and lying for. And yet there was not one who dared pronounce the words which rose to all lips mechanically, and say: "Lucky fellow!" of the richest man in Koopstad.

For God's finger held them back.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### COMPOS MENTIS.

THE fool sat in his room, by the fireside, with his hands in his lap. His eyes were closed. Night lay over them. And over his soul lay the twilight of a great sorrow and of a glorious dawn.

How much did he know of himself? Of that past which is ourselves in all of us to such a degree that the more thoughtful sometimes question with terror-struck wonder whether it will remain ourselves into the endless future? It is hard to say how much he knew. It seemed to him sometimes as some one else's life, and sometimes as to-day. And therein, surely, he was not a fool.

It was nearly ten years ago now that they had first told him that his father was dead. There was a past before that time, and a past after it. They had been very different, and he knew they had been different, for he had daily experienced their difference. And yet he could never properly have realized the cause of the change, for even now, though he had not held intercourse with his father through so many years, he remembered him only as in the life of to-day.

There was nothing complicated in the confusion of the fool's ideas, if once you got hold of the keynote, as his faithful nurse had done long ago. It was she, in fact, who had tuned his whole being into harmony with that keynote, developing it in constant sympathy with the central theme. To this work she had devoted her life.

Those who loved Elias understood him. And he understood only those whom he loved. The intellectual life of his soul, cramped and weakened in all its resources, lay languishing and spluttering in fitful flashes, as uncertain in its unexpected light and darkness as a wick that is dying for want of wax. But the emotional life, the life of loving and admiring and believing, independent, as it is, of all artificial development, burned on—and upward—with a steadily increasing flame. And thus his memory also was a memory of love—and, alas, of pain.. He remembered little that had attained to his mind's perception only; you could not be certain of his remembering anything at all, unless it had reached his heart. But of one thing you could be certain, that he would not forget what had touched his affections. And yet here also, he was incapable of making distinctions which are transparent to wiser men. He could not remember love as a thing of the past. Where once he loved, he loved forever, and, therefore, as I have already said, his love of the dead or departed was a memory of an eternal to-day.

"For in the Presence of my Love  
Shall be no Future and no Past."

He was a fool. He thought that dead people were still alive. And he forgot that you must have money if you want to buy bread. And the life of love, without beginning and without ending, was the one reality of his soul.

And you, if you loved him, perhaps you also would understand him better. And yet, as you do not love him——

Nay, throw down this book. There is the evening paper just come in, with to-day's stock-exchange. They're up, I believe.

Elias Lossell knew more about money than many people might have thought. He knew that, since his father's

death, they were always telling him that he was very rich. And he knew that it was a pleasant thing to be rich. Come, come—he was a philosopher, and no fool.

He lived in the same little house just outside the city, in which his father had established him nearly a quarter of a century ago. Hubert had wanted him to move into a large and beautiful villa, which had come into the market a year or so after old Lossell's death. But Elias and his nurse had both begged to be allowed to remain where they were. Elias had been to "see" the proposed dwelling, and had felt his way about its numerous rooms. It was all strange and awkward for him. He knocked against unexpected obstacles. He realized that it could never be home. It would be months before he dared feel his way alone up the stairs and across the wide vestibule. "Take me home," he said wearily. And they brought him back to the little house.

But a carriage Hubert had insisted upon his having, in spite of protests from Hendrik, who declared it to be an expensive encumbrance. "It would procure for him so many more opportunities of taking the air," said Hubert. And this it did, but Elias found his health beginning to give way under the want of exercise. So he resumed his long country-walks with Johanna. Johanna, a buxom, full-blooded female of nearly sixty genial winters, would have preferred the carriage-drives, had she not made up her mind so many years ago always to prefer what was best for her charge.

The twins, having attained their twentieth birthday shortly after their father's death, had received "*venia ætatis*," according to Dutch law, that is to say they had been declared prematurely of age. Hendrik had wished to have this privilege restricted to himself alone, but Hubert refused to allow any such distinction to be made between them, and he got both his mother and the old notary to second his demand for equal rights. The brother who had

always looked upon himself as number one was surprised to see how "le cadet" came to the front in this and other matters of business. Hubert took his place as if upheld by some secret authority, and quietly imposed his opinion whenever he considered this desirable. Hendrik could not help smarting at times under a feeling of weakness he seemed unable to overcome.

The financial affairs of the old merchant had been wound up as soon as the brothers were entitled to act. With Notary Borlett's willing co-operation—for herein he felt he was taking the interests of all parties into account—a deed was drawn up by which Elias undertook to pay his step-mother an income sufficient to enable her to keep up her position in Koopstad as Hendrik Lossell's widow. This deed received Elias's more or less shaky signature, his hand being guided to make it. The money was not paid during any length of time, for Judith did not survive her husband many years. It was a great bitterness to her during this closing period of her life to be dependent on the step-son to whom she had shown so little charity.

Furthermore it was agreed that—in estimating the merchant's liabilities and assets—his five shares in the business should be rated at two hundred per cent. At this price they were bought for Elias, and the surplus, thus obtained, was divided as Lossell's residuary estate. Considering the profits made in recent years, the price, though high, could in no wise be considered unreasonable. But the result was that the twin-brothers were now entirely excluded from a share in the business, which became the exclusive property of Elias.

It became the exclusive property of a man, therefore, who was as incapable of managing it to his own advantage as a babe unborn. And accordingly all parties recognised as just that his two step-brothers should be taken into partnership with him. A contract was entered into by which Elias was recognised as sleeping partner, while Hen-



drik and Hubert were to share all responsibility between them.

So far, so good. But it was when it came to settling the division of profits that the great diversity of opinion made itself felt. "Share and share alike," said Hendrik. "All profits to be divided into three equal parts." Hubert, on his side, clung to his original idea that old Volderdoes's testament must be respected, and eighty-five per cent. paid out to Elias's fortune. The more his brother objected, the more vehemently he defended his opinion—not that he desired to remain poor, but because that obstinacy of chivalry had taken possession of him, into which opposition to a self-sacrificing offer will readily drive a man, the poignancy of which is increased by the shame of the thought, that defeat would, after all, not be so very unpleasant.

Hendrik, however, flatly refused to waste his whole existence in the amassing of a useless pile of gold. He would rather start a new business for himself, he said, than bind his abilities down to such life-long servitude. The notary admitted that chivalry must have its limits, even among men of business, and he ultimately succeeded in effecting a compromise by which seventy per cent. was allotted as dividend to the shares and thirty per cent. to the acting partners, while it was furthermore agreed that the latter should be entitled to buy up a certain number of shares, as soon as they had capital to do so, at a price to be fixed by consultation with experts. Other concessions Hubert refused to consent to. The brothers quarrelled with brotherly energy.

But ultimately, as each felt that he had acted in a truly generous manner, the hearts of both were filled with that kindly glow which a good action never fails to inspire, and they settled down into the daily routine of business, under protest, but not in animosity, only irritated by the thought that the unfortunate go-between should have so woefully mismanaged the matter.

They both decided, with youthful alacrity, that the whole family, Elias included, must have a notary better able to do his work, whatever it might happen to be. They were glad to find themselves agreed on any subject whatsoever. And Hubert left the choice of Borlett's successor to Hendrik.

And the notary, who had arranged everything for these overgrown children with much taking of pains and comparatively small profit to himself, smiled quietly when he saw the brothers pass his door. He knew that the man who effects a reconciliation between various members of a quarrelsome family is always the last to be forgiven. But presently he thought of Elias—and then the smile died away from his lips.

For Elias, it was now agreed, had the full possession of his wits, and therefore was responsible for what he did with them. No trustees of any kind had been appointed to look after his affairs. The whole of his huge fortune lay, theoretically, at his disposal. In reality it was invested almost entirely in government securities or the business, and looked after by his brothers in conjunction with the notary.

"It is much better so," said Hubert. "The result obtained is just the same as if we had been appointed curators, and we avoid all the useless, wearisome formalities. Besides, why subject him to all the superfluous scandal and disgrace? By acting thus we respect poor Elias's reputation in the city, and we leave him as free as he possibly can be in his peculiar circumstances to do what he chooses with his own."

"That is quite true," said Hendrik.

And many another man, cooler than Hubert or more disinterested than Hendrik, would have reasoned as they.

"I think you are right, undoubtedly," said Dr. Pillemaer, when Hubert went to him for assistance, "in deferring as long as possible the official declaration of your half-brother's insanity. It will always be time enough, when

the step has become altogether inevitable. And that is not nearly the case as yet. The formalities, as you know, are numerous and disagreeable, and the practical result would be pretty much the same, I suppose, as at present, namely, that you and your brother would manage his affairs. I have my serious doubts, besides, whether the judges would consider the case a fit one for intervention. I am a medical man, so you must allow me to abuse the lawyers. But I am willing to admit that in this particular instance I should be at a loss what to say. Elias is not an idiot like other idiots. As for maliciousness, he is a better man, I fancy, than most of us who have got our senses and make a bad use of them. As for incapacity, he can be helped to sign his name; he can be made to understand, at least for the moment, whatever is said to him; and he can answer distinctly enough. I don't say he isn't imbecile, but I say that it is difficult to decide in what measure. He has only got to open those magnificent eyes of his. I should always be afraid that the man of law who finds those eyes fixed full upon him will not dare to say there is anything wrong with the brains of their owner. No, no. Avoid all extra unpleasantness, and be good to him; be very good to him. It is a great responsibility."

"It is indeed," said Hubert, as he wrung the doctor's hand.

Koopstad, therefore, respected Elias Lossell as it never would have done otherwise, had they taken his money away from him. Nobody ever approached him, except a very few intimates. A halo of delicious golden mystery formed round his solitude and his wealth. A number of young ladies, and not only the very young, fell hopelessly in love with his beautiful face and his beautiful fortune. Shoals of begging letters, addressed to him personally, were delivered at the little house. Johanna kept them from him, for they agitated him too much. But nevertheless, he continued to excite a great deal of interest and envy and cupidity and

curiosity. He was the far-off wonder of the city. And it was touching to see, said the neighbours, at first, how kind his brothers were to him. And yet their relations must often present peculiar difficulties, because he was so very much richer than they, you know.

Not long after the death of Judith Lossell Hubert went out to Shanghai to promote the interests of the house in China. Such an arrangement had become unavoidable, and Hubert, whose rather romantic nature ever allowed itself to be attracted by the novel or the unusual, was far from unwilling to go. There did not exist so much sympathy between the two brothers, that both could not placidly contemplate the prospect of a separation. Nor could the parting from Elias cause his step-brother any very acute regret, for Elias lived a life too entirely blocked out from the rest of the world to be very near to the daily interests of anyone. Hendrik would be there to look after him, and, still better, Johanna, and that would suffice.

A few months later Hendrik, tired of living alone, announced to the astonished world of Koopstad his engagement to his "cousin," Cornelia Alers. Koopstad disapproved of the engagement.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A "STRUGGLE-FOR-LIFER."

THAT, in itself, would not have had any particular significance, for Koopstad disapproved of every engagement. Not of engagements in general, for these it considered to be the very pillar and foundation of the State, but somehow, if you believed the Koopstad ladies, the wrong people were always getting engaged to each other. The whole subject, of course, concerns the ladies only; the gentlemen took a very languid interest in it, and ordinarily confined themselves to pitying the man—brutes. But it certainly was very deeply to be deplored that, whereas a young betrothal is always such a beautiful and interesting and touching event, the ladies of Koopstad never could entirely surrender themselves to the charm of contemplating one with feelings of unmixed satisfaction. "It was a very desirable match from many points of view, but"—and then they would lower their horns and butt at the unfortunate pair. And indeed it is very sad to contemplate the perversity of all these young people who will not see that they could be perfectly happy and excellently suited to each other, if only the couples would make up differently. It is very sad, and it would be still much sadder, if the peculiarity of Koopstad were not peculiar to every corner of the globe where three women with marriageable daughters, or with marriageable selves, get together over fifteen cups of tea—it is coffee in Germany, but the principle remains the same. And a woman long thinks her daughters marriageable, and, if she have no daughters, herself yet more marriageable still.

It was not only the ladies of Koopstad, however (whose sincerity could not even reckon on mutual recognition), that cried out at the news of Hendrik Lossell's engagement. No woman ever listens with any degree of confidence to another woman's talk about her own sex—they know too well, the darlings, the why and the wherefore of their sugared blame and yet more sourly sugared praise—ah, sugar is a terrible acid!—but when the men unanimously declared Hendrik to be a fool, their wives and daughters sat up and listened. Stereotyped expressions of condolence with a "victim" the ladies were accustomed to; they considered, however, that this particular case was entitled to more detailed discussion. What had the men to say against *Mejuffrouw Cornelia Alers*?

Well, to begin with, she was a couple of years older than her suitor, and, you know, we always pull up our noses at that, especially when the boy is just under thirty, and the old lady is just—this pen refuses to write the word that was destined to follow. Let lawyers and doctors do what ignoble duty their professions may sometimes require of them; no gentleman ever yet said of his own free will that an unmarried woman was over thirty.

For the last year or two *Cornelia Alers* had been twenty-nine.

In addition to this she had a Roman nose. With a woman's aptitude for seeing her own bright side, she considered that this ancient feature imparted an aristocratic appearance to her face. And perhaps she was not altogether mistaken in her supposition, for she certainly had an air of hauteur over her which she possibly owed to the bend of the nose, or possibly to her unusual height (no execrable pun is intended), or yet more probably to her indomitable trust in her own superiority. Having been placed, a big woman, in a limited sphere, she had firmly resolved to bring her surroundings into harmony with her stature, and so she set her heavy foot on the social ladder of Koopstad and



clomb, and clomb, higher and higher, as high as little Hendrik Lossell. The social ladder of Koopstad was a living organism, more like a tree than a ladder, securely planted and rooted in the mean soil of our dusty humanity, manured by frequent offerings of filthy lucre, and daily watered with the tears of the unsuccessful aspirants down below. Hendrik Lossell did not sit on its topmost branch—Elias would have sat there, had he not been an idiot—but he sat at an elevation where the fruit already hung sufficiently thick, and where the ladies of the company, when they looked downwards, which they seldom did, could no longer perceive the Cornelia Alerses. This social tree, for it is a tree, and no ladder, has in common with some few other trees that its fruit grows thickest towards the top, and it has in common with most, that no fruit at all ever grows on the bare stem which supports the fat little crown, and feeds it.

Cornelia Alers believed that happiness dwelt at the top of the tree, and misery at the bottom. You would have thought that she had never tasted rotten fruit, nor ever reposed in the shade.

Her belief had in it that element of ignorance which peppers all belief. For she knew nothing either of the hard work at the bottom nor of the sunshiny indolence at the top. The Alerses were by no means great people in Koopstad, but they were just unlittle enough to frantically aspire to be greater. Yet—thank Heaven—they were not so little that their daughters, however needy, should stoop to honest work. Koopstad is old-fashioned, and it checks the tide in many places where larger communities have already sailed out to sea.

The Alerses had committed the seven cardinal sins, for they were poor, and they had committed an eighth, for Alers senior had married above him. This eighth transgression, by attracting notice, brought out the misery of all the other seven. And the junior Alerses, the lawyer and his brother and Cornelia and her three sisters, soon found that their

only chance of absolution was to go and sin no more. So they played in the State Lottery, and also in the lottery of the married state, and they wriggled and haggled, and turned their dresses and their opinions, and ran errands and social risks, and fell and picked themselves up and smiled sweetly when people asked—also sweetly—whether they were hurt. There was not one form of shabby-genteel suffering from which they shrank. They even went to stay with their mother's rich relations. The world is full of these quiet heroisms "that nobody knows nothing of." We have all admired, and rightly, the Spartan boy whose face remained serene while the fox was consuming his vitals, but we nowhere read that he sat smiling, smiling all through that repast, and then said it was the nicest thing on earth and when might he come again? People gave him immense credit for his fortitude, as he knew they would be sure to do all the time he was performing, but all those who had "arrived" said the Alerses were fools for their pains and laughed when they slipped off the rungs of the ladder.

And so the stately Cornelia was engaged to Hendrik Lossell. How had she managed to obtain his consent? That was the question which Koopstad—at least female Koopstad—was dying to know. Many a man has become a great general by studying other great generals' victories.

Alas, the conquest of Hymen's land is rarely the prize of a brief campaign, unless the invader be largely supplied with the sinews of war. Cornelia had plenty of sinews, but they were not of the right kind. They helped her, however, to dance attendance (literally) at every raid into the enemy's country to which she could procure an invitation. And she got somebody's cousin to have Thomas put up for the Casino, on the express understanding that Hendrik was to be put up too.

Do not accuse the young fellow of being a heartless cynic who stood watching her tall figure and skinny shoulders through the mazes of the dance, and who, from his safe

coign of vantage against a window, sent forth unkind thoughts about women generally upon the patient air. They were true, I doubt not, but he did not mean them. No good man ever thinks bad thoughts about women. They waylay him, and rob him of all he possesses—his good name, first, which was not of much use to himself, probably, but which is utterly worthless to them—and when they have stripped him entirely and left him lying bleeding in the way, they come back after a minute to give him another ha'penny-worth of happiness and to twist their pretty fingers round once more in his gaping wounds, and then they kill him. But he never utters a word of complaint, and he smiles upon them, and is good and beautiful and patient in death. That is to say, if he be a man deserving the name. It is only your base-born cowards that beg for quarter. "Your money or your life," cries the brigand who meets you on the high-road. And you give your money cheerfully to avoid the alternative, especially if you happen to have left your purse at home. Beware of the woman-brigand. She asks for both.

Give them to her. Only mind you choose your brigand wisely. You will be all the happier for your loss.

The man who would speak evil of a woman is a churl.

The poor things are already sufficiently hard-pressed. For all the women do it.

All the females who attended the Casino-gatherings said unkind things about Cornelia and her improvised dresses from her eighteenth year to her twenty-sixth. Then they pitied her too sincerely to honour her with more than an occasional sneer, and she was ticketed and numbered and put away. Nobody thought any more about her, but that did not hinder her thinking about herself. And so she laboured on quietly, while others played around her. Poor weary struggler, if she be not deserving of pity, to whom shall we accord it? And when all the ladies said that she must be at least a hundred, and all the gentlemen that

really, you know, they were certain she could not be younger than Lossell, she hooked the young fellow, and played, landed, frittered, fried and swallowed him before the horrified eyes of the entire female population of Koopstad.

And this is how it came about. How can anyone's biographer be excused for telling it? It has all been told a hundred times before. I sometimes wonder, had Eve been born without the wiles of Eve's daughters, would there ever have been the story of Adam's sons to tell?

She was hopeless at last, was the brave huntress, utterly dispirited and dejected, despite her Roman nose. Her younger sister, Aurelia, had made a capital settlement, having married an old widower with sixty thousand florins a year and six daughters, the whole half dozen of whom she had sent out to boarding-school within a month after she had entered the house. Another sister, just out, was to be seen at the Casino every Wednesday and Friday, fleeing in Parthian style from a young officer whom—to remain classical—the victory of Pyrrhus would too soon befall. And she, she went up to her chamber-window to look vainly down the desolate road. That is to say, she sat down on her sofa and sighed. It was no use looking out of her window, for she would only have caught cold and reddened the Roman nose. Besides, there was no one there.

"I shall give up going to the Casino," she remarked to Thomas. "Do you know, I think it has got very stupid of late. All the nice people seem to stop away."

"Lossell had a committee meeting of some sort to-night," said Thomas.

She flashed out at him. "There are more people in the world than Lossell," she said, "and nicer. I wasn't thinking of him."

"Of course not," he answered. "You were thinking of Paffer."

Paffer was the young officer, whom Cornelia hated like poison, on account of her sister's success.

"You are pleased," she said, "to think yourself funny. And so you would be, if you weren't stupid."

"And you are proud," he replied, "to think yourself spiteful. And so you would be, if you weren't unhappy."

You see, they were hardly an amiable couple, this brother and sister. They were given to recrimination, and vulgar squabbling. But they liked each other, in their own disagreeable way.

After a few moments—while Cornelia, struck by the accuracy of her brother's last thrust, was still casting about for a reply—Thomas began again :

"Look here, Cornelia, we needn't joke through the last scene of what is fast turning into a tragedy. You're as good—or as bad—as an old woman by this time. Best be plain-spoken. You've been lying in the shop-window for nigh upon a dozen seasons, and—demmy—reduced prices or not, you can't be left there much longer. As you say, you had much better give over going to the Casino, where you only serve as a foil to the younger girls. Look the inevitable future in the face, as you ought to have done six years ago, and take your seat by the fireplace and knit."

If Thomas spoke thus coarsely, it was very much on account of his own anger and disgust at his sister's failure. He was anxious, too, about her ultimate fate, for, though you might easily talk about sitting down by the fireside, it would not be so easy to say who would pay for coals. Like her sisters, Cornelia had invested her small patrimony in the matrimonial business. Bankruptcy seemed impending.

"You had better sell your muslin ball-dress to Ninnie," added the head of the family. "It will do for her betrothal to Paffer."

Cornelia's rugged old heart was not easily shaken. But under these heavy blows of her brother's hammer a pair of tears squeezed through the crevices and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Young Thomas was not proof against these silent symp-

toms of distress. "I don't mean to be unkind," he said uneasily. "Only we may as well 'sail straight.' The case is desperate. It's 'kill or cure.' Now, I'm willing to do all I can to help you. Do you want Hendrik Lossell to propose to you, or do you not?"

Cornelia made a movement of disavowal.

"I know you do," said Thomas coolly. "Of course. Well, I will undertake that he shall come and ask you to be his wife within less than twelve hours—that is, therefore, to-morrow morning before lunch—if you undertake, on your part, to help me afterwards in anything I may stand in need of. We go into partnership, and this is the first stroke of business combined by the firm. Is it a bargain?"

"Get him to do as you say," whispered Cornelia, "and I'll do anything you like for you afterwards, Thomas. Oh, Thomas, I *can't* be an old maid!"

"No, you can't," said Thomas. "We can't afford it." And so they shook hands on their contract.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE MARRIAGE-LOTTERY.

THE next morning, at an early hour—the doors of the office were barely open—Thomas Alers was ushered into the private room of the acting head of the house of Volderdoes Zonen.

The actual head of the firm and proprietor of the business was at that moment pottering about in the greenhouse which his brothers had built for him on his modest premises, and querulously demanding of the gardener whether or no the pink chrysanthemums had already come out.

Hendrik Lossell did not rise to receive his visitor, but extended the tips of his fingers with a slightly condescending air. He was very proud of his position at that great table full of documents, was Hendrik Lossell. All the prouder, perhaps, because the position was not quite what it ought to have been and what he had always expected, for the whole of Koopstad knew perfectly well that the real owner of the business was the fool.

The young Hendrik could only prolong the connection which the old one had begun and lived through, and suffered and died under. They were practically everything, except— After all, they remained intruders, hard-working, inadequately rewarded intruders, and the real Volderdoes was Elias.

“How de do,” said Hendrik carelessly. We have dropped the note of interrogation in that question long ago. “Keen weather, eh?” Nevertheless, he was surprised that

the hand which Alers drew out of a thickly wadded glove should be so cold. He did not know when the glove had been put on. Looking up, he was surprised to see that the young advocate's face betrayed signs of considerable agitation. A good deal more, besides the glove, had been put on at the door.

"Good heavens, what's the matter?" cried Hendrik—the note of interrogation now in full play.

"Hush," replied Thomas in alarm. "Nothing. Why do you ask, Lossell?"

"Why? Just look at your face in the glass! A man doesn't look like that and expect no one to notice it."

Thomas cast a quick glance at a narrow mirror which hung between the two windows—the great, squinting Chinaman was over the mantelpiece. The cute young lawyer recognised with satisfaction his own aptitude for playing a part, but he exaggerated his self-praise (some people do), for nature had helped him considerably by flurrying him in spite of himself.

"I assure you it's nothing," he said, "at least nothing to agitate anyone, only I am so stupid in these matters. But I may as well tell you, Lossell. In fact, I wanted to tell you. Imagine what has happened to me this morning. One of the last things I should have expected ever to occur to such unfortunates as our family have always been. You are sure no one can hear us?"—he looked apprehensively towards the glass doors, which were closed. It was a peculiarity of Hendrik Junior's character that he elected to have them closed as a rule, in spite of the inconvenience and disturbance occasioned by the constant opening and shutting, as message after message passed from the outer office into the inner room. Herein he was different from his father, who had always preferred to remain in touch with the clerks at work beyond.

"Of course not," said Hendrik impatiently. "Go on."

"I had a letter from our Amsterdam bankers this morn-

ing, Henk.—Don't laugh at our having bankers" (Lossell was not thinking of laughing). "Every poor beggar has. The robbers manage to secure their tax on ten florins as well as on ten thousand.—Well, I had a letter from them this morning and—you saw the announcement in the evening papers yesterday about the first prize of the Vienna 1864 Lottery having 'fallen' in Amsterdam?"

"Yes," cried Hendrik, "and I wondered who the lucky beggar was. It's a fortune. Donnerwetter! Tommy, it isn't you?"

"Not me, no, worse luck. I wish it was. But it's Cornelia. Hang her. As if girls wanted money to get through the world!"

"I suppose everybody wants that," said Hendrik moodily. He was pricked with envy, and he didn't see why the eldest Miss Alers should not need a little ready cash to secure her a place in the wedding-coach.

"Yes, but a man wants it to buy bread with, and a woman to buy cake. A woman of our class always gets her bread from somebody, husband or father or brother. Now this sum in my hands would have meant a million within a twelvemonth, while in my sister's it represents a respectable four per cent. till the end of the chapter."

For it was in the good old time when people still got four per cent. for their money, and yet slept at night.

"You penniless people always think money breeds like rabbits," said Hendrik snappishly. "I wish to goodness it would. But I'm sure I congratulate you. It's a fortune, as I said."

"Hardly a fortune. It's about a quarter of a million florins, but an outrageous quantity goes off in Government percentage and so on. Still, it's a lot of money. You must congratulate her, though, not me. It's no advantage to me in any way, except in so far as I'm awfully glad for her."

After that, neither spoke for a few moments, for each

was busy with his own thoughts. Thought Thomas: "If he doesn't begin now, I shall have to."

And Hendrik thought: "Here goes!"

"Does your sister Cornelia know already?" he asked.

"No, not yet."

"And I suppose nobody else does, in that case?"

"No. I got the letter just as I was starting for my office, and then I thought I might as well come round and tell you on my way. But I must be off. I'm late enough, as it is."

And he jumped up, and began buttoning his coat.

"Wait a minute," cried Hendrik. "By Jove, Tom, I wish you had kept your secret a day or two longer. Your bringing it to me puts me in a very awkward position. I—I hardly know how to say it."

"What?" asked Alers sharply, turning full upon him.

"Well, look here. You know I have long been—how shall I express it?—paying my court to your sister. Je lui ai fait un brin de cour. You must have noticed it."

"Never," said Thomas energetically.

"Oh, come, you must have. Why, everybody did. I've been chaffed about it over and over again at the Casino. People thought we were engaged."

It was true that he had been chaffed, but chiefly on account of the dead set the Roman nose had made at him. "Fly to me, my good Henkie," a fat motherly old aunt had said to him, spreading out her wide skirts from her seat against the wall. "Creep under, if the worst comes to the worst. I shall tell her, when she looks for you, that you are lost in admiration."

"I never heard about it," said Thomas. "But that proves nothing. Brothers are the last people to hear that kind of chaff."

"It's true, all the same; and no wonder I should think of marrying. That big house is very lonely since my mother died last year. And I've been looking for an oppor-

tunity to ask your sister about it—by G——, I have. I should have done so, in all probability, last night, if I hadn't been prevented from going to the Casino."

He almost believed himself, with such energy of conviction did he speak.

"Now, you see," he went on hurriedly, sweeping over the words, ere his friend could interrupt, "this scrap of information you have just brought me puts me in a very painful position. For if I choose this moment to propose to your sister, everybody will say that I did it for the money. Of course that's absurd, as you know. I may not be as rich as I ought to be, or as some people think, but I'm not poor enough not to feel free in the choice of a wife."

"I don't know about people's thinking," said Thomas. "I believe it's pretty generally known that your step-brother is the rich man, and not you."

Hendrik winced. Decidedly Thomas was cruel.

"Yes, that was Hubert's doing," said Hendrik. "He couldn't keep a quiet tongue in his head. He's much better away at Shanghai with his English wife. But you must admit it would look strange."

"Very strange," said Thomas gravely.

"Not so very strange, hang it, if people weren't always so disgracefully ill-natured, for everybody knows, as I say, that I have long been intending to propose."

"Ah, but you didn't do it," interrupted Thomas.

"Oh, but, Tom, I say: do *you* mean to imply that I want Cornelia for her money, when I never heard till to-day of her possessing a penny in the world?"

"No, my dear fellow; it's the last thing I should think of. I am quite sure you would be far above anything of the kind. But we must reckon, as you say, with the ill-natured world around us. The worst of it is, these money matters can never be kept dark, in spite of everybody concerned being sworn to inviolable secrecy. You see, the fact has got into the papers already, the name, in spite of any-

thing we can do, will be all over the place in a couple of days. And neither the rest of the world, nor Cornelia herself, will consider the moment was happily selected for a proposal."

"But if I had been at the Casino last night, or you hadn't told me this morning, I shouldn't have known," said Hendrik obstinately.

"That is true," acquiesced the young lawyer thoughtfully. And he stood for a moment, considering the dilemma. Then he said: "If you mean what you say, Hendrik, as doubtless you do, the only way I can see out of the difficulty is for you to get the whole business over with Cornelia before she, or anybody else, knows anything of this change in her fortunes. In that case I will tell Cornelia that, knowing you were intending to ask her, I kept back my news that you might not be influenced by it, and we sha'n't let out the story, if we can help it, till after your engagement has been announced."

"Capital!" cried Hendrik. "You're a right-down good fellow, Tom. In that case there's no time to be lost." He actually ran toward the peg on which his hat and coat were hung. But, in doing so, he stopped. He was not half such a rogue, after all, as the other.

"Only, I say," he began, "is that quite fair towards your sister?"

"No," replied Thomas coolly. "It isn't. And, therefore, as you yourself broach the subject, let me be plain with you. It isn't fair to her. Accordingly, it must be understood between us that you ask her at once, without the slightest delay, to be your wife. If she refuses you, there's an end of the matter. If she accepts you, I tell her, also at once, about this lottery-prize. And then you must return her her liberty and leave her altogether free to reconsider her decision. So much you owe to her, but you needn't be alarmed. If I know anything of my sister, she will act honorably under all circumstances. And then, as soon as



these preliminaries are settled, there must be no time lost before giving the news to the world."

"I accept," said Hendrik, taking down his hat. "Shall I find your sister at home if I go now?"

"Yes, but wait a minute. I'm willing to do you this service and keep a quiet tongue in my head. But you'll remember, please, that I did so, and when the time comes, you'll not deny that you owe me a good turn?"

"No," replied Hendrik. "Can I take you on anywhere? I shall have a cab called at once." And he whistled through a speaking tube that lay upon his writing-table.

"Well, as you offer it. I'm awfully late. I don't know what my clients will say. Let us arrange that I fetch you at our house after a couple of hours, and then, if all be satisfactorily decided, we can lunch together at the Club and start the news of your engagement. There's nothing in the world—not even wildfire—spreads half as fast."

"Yes, that will do very well."

"But it's a bargain about my getting help from you in my turn?"

"Yes," said Hendrik with his lips to the tube.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### BLANK.

"WELL?" asked Thomas a couple of hours later, pausing in the hall of his own house as Hendrik issued from the door of the dining-room to meet him.

"You may congratulate the happiest of mortals," replied Lossell. "Cornelia has promised to be mine."

"So be it," said Thomas. "Now just let me go in to her for a moment, and then we can drive to the Club together. I see you have kept your cab."

"Yes, to sit in and wait, in case she had refused me," answered Hendrik gaily.

"Two hours!" ejaculated Thomas, shaking his head. "Well, well, true love was always reckless and regardless of expense." And he disappeared behind the dining-room door, closing it carefully after him.

The fair Cornelia was standing by the window, looking out into the dull garden. She turned round slowly, as her brother came in. There was a glad light of contentment over her forehead, but it died away at sight of the young advocate, just as the sunlight slips from your chamber-wall before a falling blind.

"Well?" said Thomas, repeating the brief greeting he had used to Hendrik.

"He has proposed to me," replied Cornelia dryly, "and I have accepted him. That is all."

"All?" said Thomas indignantly. "Nonsense. You might give me a word of thanks for having managed so well

for you what young ladies usually settle for themselves." He threw a hundredweight of spite on the word "young."

"On the contrary," averred Cornelia with no less acrimony, "he tells me that he has been wanting to ask me for ever so long. He says modesty has deterred him; that's rubbish. Modesty only deters men from doing what they don't wish to do but ought to. And as soon as *you* want him to do it, he does it. That means that you've been keeping him back hitherto. And I should like to know how, Thomas, and why."

"I?" said Thomas innocently. "Come, that's too bad. The patcher-up of lovers' quarrels always gets the abuse they had destined for each other. My dear Corry, I regret that I couldn't get him sooner. Be glad that I got him so soon. You must allow that twelve hours isn't bad."

"If you have got him so soon," she insisted, "you could have got him much sooner. You have been keeping him off, and I repeat I should like to know why."

He shrugged his shoulders: "Keeping him off!" he repeated with scorn. "I had trouble enough to bring him up to the scratch. Swallow him, and digest him thankfully, and ask no questions as to how he was caught and cooked. Poor fellow!"

"Thomas!" she burst out, the tears of rage gathering in her eyes, "I don't believe you. To think that I could have been married perhaps before I was th-th-thirty!"—her feelings overcame her.—"Go away!" she cried, "I don't want ever to see you again!"

"Dear me," said Thomas coolly. "I am glad to see you can still be childish. I should have thought you would have forgotten the way by this time. 'Before you were thirty!' What utter folly, Cornelia. Lossell hasn't been hesitating as long as all that."

"Tell me what brought him round?" she said in a wheedling voice, taking her hands from her face.

"Not to-day," replied Thomas, who did not quite trust

the strength of nerve of his sister's conscience. "I've no time. He's waiting for me in the hall. I dare say he heard you yell out you were past thirty."

And with this parting shot he retired. It was too bad of Cornelia to get such an idea into her head. She would take a very different view of the matter in a day or two, when he informed her of the truth. But, in the meantime, she cut up rough.

"It's all right," he said to Lossell, who was anxiously pacing the narrow hall. "Only she thinks you don't know about the money. I had to leave her that little illusion. And so will you have to. The women can't do without a semblance of love."

"What a lucky thing it is that they are content with a semblance," added this young philosopher, as Hendrik was waking the cabman. "Now we men are different, we either want the real thing or no pretence at all. And we are quite satisfied to do without the semblance when the real thing can't be got. How awful it would be if women were like that!"

Hendrik did not cry out against the charge implied in these words. Perhaps he did not hear it. He occupied himself with poking his umbrella into the cabman's dingy cape-protected sides, till the old fellow became dimly conscious that he was wanted.

And then they drove to the Club and had lunch and a bottle of Heidsieck Monopole. And Thomas told everybody about Hendrik's good fortune, and everybody congratulated Hendrik, and then went away into the smoking-room, and laughed.

Next day—on a beautiful afternoon of early frost, one of those days when all earth and all heaven are in a glitter of radiant cold—Hendrik Lossell and his Cornelia walked down arm in arm to see the skating on the "Koopstad Ice-Club's" submerged field. Thereby they announced their

engagement to all the world's wife and daughters. No one had heard a whisper as yet of the fair fiancée's supposed accession to fortune. And somebody said that meeting Cornelia out with that little boy at her side reminded you of that other Roman dame who fetched her lumps of mischief home from school and tried to pass them off on her friends as "jewels." Rough diamonds they probably were.

And Hendrik wrote to Hubert, out at Shanghai, that he was engaged to Cornelia Alers, whom Hubert would doubtless remember, the girl with the majestic bearing, and that he hoped that he—Hendrik—would be as happy in his married life as Hubert was with the English girl he had chosen out yonder, and who had already gladdened his heart with a couple of children. Should he add a word about Cornelia Aler's quarter of a million florins? He thought not. No, better wait till next mail.

So they were happy. Cornelia bestowed upon Hendrik the most statuesque of smiles, and Hendrik brought to Cornelia the most costly of hothouse flowers. He soon noticed that she did not care for flowers unless they were costly. For she said: "Oh, what beautiful roses! They are sixpence apiece at this time of the year."

Hendrik was deeply mortified, for they had cost him eightpence halfpenny, and he considered she ought to have known.

Nevertheless they were happy. And the ladies of Koopstad, having a new subject for discussion and defamation, were happy too.

On the third day after the day of the engagement Thomas started up from the newspaper he was reading at the Club with an exclamation of such violence that Hendrik dropped his "Review of Finance" into the grate.

"Hush," he said, turning round in alarm. "They will hear you over there. What's the matter?"

"Let them hear!" cried Alers hoarsely. He ran to the central table and rummaged with nervous hand among the chaos of newspapers scattered there. "Help me to find another list of the Vienna prizes, Lossell. Help me quick. The Amsterdam Gazette or something! Good heavens, supposing there was to be some mistake."

Lossell needed no second injunction. "How do you mean 'wrong'?" he asked in a whisper, as he joined his friend in the search.

He got no answer. The advocate hurriedly snatched at a journal and tore it open—with a great screech of rent paper—casting agitated glances down its columns. "Merciful Heaven, it is true!" he murmured, in a long-drawn gasp. The paper fell from his hand. Hendrik Lossell stood opposite him white and uncertain. "Come away, Hendrik," said Alers gently, after that first moment of paralysis, "I must speak to you. No, not here. Let us go home."

They paused for a few seconds outside the Club-entrance, under the full light of the lamp. "What next?" asked Lossell.

Alers seemed completely to have lost his ordinary cool alertness. "Not in the open street," he said dazedly. "Let us take a cab again, like, like that other time." And they got into one.

"Where to?" said Lossell, his hand on the door.

"Oh, anywhere," replied the other. Lossell gave Alers's address.

"Henk," began Alers, as they were driving through the lighted streets, "I may as well tell you at once. The number announced in the papers is not the number our bankers have sent me. There's some mistake. And I hope it's the papers have made it."

"Oh, the lists in the papers are always inaccurate," said Hendrik, much flurried. "Mistakes almost constantly occur."



"Yes, but the two papers agree," remarked Thomas, shaking his head.

"That proves nothing. This information emanates from the same source. Let us drive to some money agents and inquire. What is the number you have? Do you know?"

"Do I know?" repeated Thomas. "I should think so. No. 37, Series 2419. But it's no use going to a banker's at this hour."

"Then let's telegraph to Amsterdam so as to get an answer first thing to-morrow."

"We can do that, if you like. It's not much use, but we can do it. My dear Hendrik, how I hope this is a false alarm. What a disappointment it would be for—her."

"And what is the number in the newspapers?" asked Hendrik testily.

"The series is the same, 2419. But the lot is 39 instead of 37."

"The bankers are sure to know best," said Hendrik with an assurance he was far from feeling. They drove to the telegraph-office, and Thomas telegraphed. And then they parted, not so cordially as three days ago. "He's left me to pay the cab this time," said Thomas to himself, as he drove off alone in the direction of home. "Well, I suppose it's worth a cab fare. It's a miserable business. I should never have considered myself justified in doing it, if necessity hadn't squeezed our throats so tight."

Hendrik Lossell went home and had a bad night of it, the worst he ever spent in his life. During the whole of his later reckless career, when far larger sums hung in the balance, he never experienced such a horror of anxiety again. We get accustomed to the presence of anxiety, if only it will take a consistent form.

As the slow hours waited on each other, he tossed to and fro upon his bed. Endless rows of figures danced up and

down before his eyes. The room was hot, he thought, in spite of the dying fire and the occasional crack of the frost outside. The room was stifling. He threw off the bed-clothes, and shivered with cold.

And the next morning Thomas Alers came to him, before he had left for the office. He was sitting at his lonely breakfast in the great dull dining-room where Elias had first been stricken with blindness. Thomas brought a telegram with him. And the telegram contained only these words:

"Series 2,419. No. 39."

The first thing which Hendrik noticed was that Thomas had cut off the signature.

He fell back in his chair without a word of complaint, and sat stupidly staring in front of him.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," began Thomas Alers. "But there's no one to blame except the bankers. We shall leave them at once, of course, and take some other firm. They have always kept the list of our lottery tickets and shares, and they sent me a memorandum as I told you, to the effect that No. 37 was out with the prize."

"I don't believe," said Hendrik huskily, "that any firm in Christendom would make such a mistake as that."

"No firm in Jewry would," replied Alers with an ugly laugh. "Nonsense, Henk, you don't mean to insinuate that I'm telling you lies? I'll show you the memorandum if you like."

"What is the name of the firm?" asked Hendrik, with a certain amount of menace in his tone.

"I told you last night when we telegraphed that I could not, in all honor, betray them. It would ruin them, if the thing were to get known."

"Nevertheless," said Hendrik, "I, and I only, have a right to know it."

"You have not. You will see the memorandum, with the name cut out, and that must suffice. Lossell, you are

most insulting. I should not permit you to doubt my word in this manner, if I did not take the vexation of the moment into account. I can understand your disappointment, but its expression must remain within bounds." And lanky young Alers blustered and tried to look broad.

Hendrik Lossell was not a passionate man. Or rather, the quiet fury of his passion burned white and flameless, unnoticed by all except by him whose heart it consumed.

"Sit down," he said calmly, "and let us talk." There was an intensity of purpose in his quiet gesture which caused the other to sneak into the corner of a big black sofa.

"Look here, Alers," said Hendrik. "You have fooled me. There's no denying it. You played the part very well till now, but this final scene is too difficult, even for so good an actor as you are. Don't jabber at me; it's useless. The whole thing was got up; I can see that. I don't believe your story about the Amsterdam bankers. I'm not a child."

"Now really, Lossell—"

"Hold your tongue, or admit the truth. I see through the whole farce, I tell you. And I consider myself free, accordingly, as regards Mejuffrouw Alers."

"You mean to say that you break it off?"

"Yes. I have been scandalously duped, and I refuse to submit to that."

"In other words," cried Alers, rising to the occasion, "you confess to having asked my sister for her money alone?"

"Not that. But I confess to not having perceived that I was being snared like a bird."

Alers got up out of his corner. "We shall see," he said, threatening in his turn, "what Koopstad society will say when you tell it your story. The moment after I had communicated to you what I believed to be my sister's good fortune, you propose to her, after having implored me not

to divulge my secret to any one. She is half a dozen years older than you. And as soon as I tell you there's a mistake about the money, you want to retract. Do, if you dare," he cried, blazing out, "and stop in Koopstad, if you can."

"She said she was twenty-nine!" cried the wretched bridegroom.

"Well, I won't contradict her. She has said it so long, that she ought to be sure about it. And where is your fine talk about the delicacy of your position, and your wishing you had never known of the lottery-prize? Enough. Gammon. You saw I didn't believe it at the time."

"I won't marry her," persisted Hendrik, reddening. "I don't care about Koopstad. It's quite true that I had liked her before all this business, but I won't marry a woman who could play a fellow such a mean trick as this."

"Is that your only difficulty?" asked Alers.

"No, but it is the chief one. I have always liked Cornelia. She is imposing, and I, for one, consider her handsome."

"Well, if it's any comfort to you, I can swear you my most solemn oath, she's as innocent as—as a new-laid egg. She knows of nothing. Convince yourself. When I went in to her, I did not tell her about the money. The trick, such as it is—but there is no trick—was mine."

Lossell went close up to his antagonist, his clenched fists held down tight by his sides.

"Blackguard!" he said.

"You are as disagreeable as you are foolish, Lossell. It is you who outwitted me when you told me you loved my sister without this money. You have treated us disgracefully. And I undertake that, if you now leave Cornelia in the lurch, this good and upright little world of Koopstad will spue you out as you deserve."

"I have always liked her," said Hendrik, "fairly well. But I won't marry her now."

And so Hendrik Lossell married the fair Cornelia. And the whole of Koopstad flowed to the church "to assist" at the ceremony. It is said, when it came out, that the preacher had been extremely edifying, and the only thing it did not understand and consequently would like to inquire about was why the bridegroom had taken the bride. The bride asked herself the same question. The bridegroom did not ask it, but he grumbled considerably over the answer.

## CHAPTER XX.

### COUSINS AND COZENAGE.

HE resolved, however, to make the best of it. And he did.

It was true, as he had admitted to Alers, that he had long felt a sneaking liking for Cornelia. "She was a woman of sense," he always said, "a woman whom you could speak with. A rare thing. For most women you can only speak to, and look at." "Well, that's one comfort," Hubert had answered—but that was several years ago, "for there's not much to look at in Keetje Alers." Hubert must have been speaking qualitatively. Quantitatively there was a good deal of Cornelia.

Yes, there was a good deal of her, and what there was belonged to that substantial sort of female architecture which does not do for sweet seventeen, but often develops wonderfully into a dignified matron at the head of her dinner-table. "She'll wear best of them all, will Cornelia," Thomas would say in reviewing his sisters. He was very vulgar and coarse; I don't deny it, but he saw without spectacles the things he wanted to see.

Cornelia, having climbed, with a lift from her brother, into the lap of Hendrik Lossell and Koopstad society, settled down majestically among what she called the duties of her position. She found herself surrounded by an army of newly acquired cousins who could not remember that her mother had been their cousin before. And although she did all she could to cure their defective memories by fre-



quent injections of facts, she found that the failing was constitutional. In fact, it was hereditary. "She is trying to cozen us," said a connection of Hendrik's, who was a wit and a ne'er-do-well. But she clung to her theory that patience would bring them round. "If you want to play your cards well in this world, you must choose the game of patience," she said to Hendrik Lossell, one day, as they were driving home from a house where they had been ungraciously received. Little Hendrik gallantly pressed a kiss on his consort's substantial arm. "You are as witty as you are clever," he said. The Dutch word which he used for "clever" is an ambiguous one; it may mean "good-looking" and it may mean "well-brained"; the English word "smart" may serve as an example of somewhat similar latitude. Those old Dutchmen were wonderfully shrewd old fellows. They understood how to preserve in close contiguity the two forms of peace most dear to their repose-loving natures, the peace of the heart and the peace of the hearth. And, having made the time-honoured discovery, which all men make and which each man must make for himself, viz., the discovery, that, by some strange perversity, most pretty women are stupid and most clever women ugly, they thought out this subtle combination which satisfied both their own consciences and the vanity of their wives. "How 'cunning' you look!" they would say, and their children say it still. And the frightfullest hag in the eleven provinces casts an approving look towards the glass.

The invention is not patented. And the discoverer of the secret makes no charge for divulging it. He generously offers it to all other nations. He makes them a present of the word. It is "Knap." Introduced into the various languages of Christendom (let us begin with petticoat-governed Christendom), it will do more towards bringing about universal harmony than the whole of Volapük.

"How 'knap' you look!" said Hendrik Lossell. But on his lips the word may have been a recognition of the

majesty of the Roman nose—no one can say. The coldness of his relatives—they were mostly his mother's people—was fast warming his heart into a blaze of affection for Cornelia. After all, she could not be held responsible for her brother's treachery. He had convinced himself that she was innocent of all complicity. He was furious with the advocate only, but the advocate, when he found the couple "billing and cooing," as he phrased it, declared he would set up a matrimonial agency. He was born a match-maker, he said to Cornelia.

"A match-seller," replied that amiable damsel.

Matron. No offence was intended. None will be given. She is still alive, but she won't read this story. She never reads novels. She has grown religious of late. At least, so she says.

Mevrouw Lossell clung for many months to the idea of conciliating her husband's relations. She only gave it up after a passage of arms with that same good-natured old aunt of his who had advised him to fly to the protection of her skirts.

"My cousin van Driel was like that," this old lady was remarking one day over the teacups. "She was so terribly frightened of fire that she used always to have a rope-ladder hanging ready from her bedroom window. And a man climbed up one night, as we had always told her would happen, and took away all the silver from under her bed. My cousin, Miss Matilda van Driel, that was. I fancy you can hardly have known her."

"She was a cousin of my mother's, Aunt Theresa," replied Mevrouw Lossell. "Don't you remember I told you so the other day, when we were speaking of 'Beechy Place' where she lived? And I knew about the ladder. I have heard the story ever since I was a little girl. And I remember the robber left some of the plate behind. People used to say he had caught a glimpse of Miss Matilda without her front, and it gave him such a turn, that he fled."

"Indeed?" said the old lady. "Will you take another cup of tea, my dear? I never heard that part of the story, and I should hardly think it was very likely, because my cousin Matilda never wore a front, you know. She had exceedingly ugly curls, but they were her own. And were you ever inside 'Beechy Place,' my dear?"

"No," replied Cornelia. "My mother did not visit there in later life."

"Indeed? Ah well, then, you never saw the sitting-room of my cousin Geertruida. My cousin Geertruida had an idea that all colours but green were injurious for the eyes. So she had her sitting-room papered and curtained and carpeted in green, and she wore a green dress and had green chair-coverings and, worst of all, the glass of the windows was green. It was very peculiar. Was she a cousin of your mother's also, my dear?"

"Why, naturally," replied Cornelia, somewhat taken aback. "She was a sister of—of Matilda's, so she must have been."

"Yes, she was a sister, as you say. And there was a third sister, Theodora. Theodora would never on any pretext enter Geertruida's sitting-room, for she had a dreadful blotchy complexion, and the green things made her look a fright. Theodora did not appear handsome in any one's sitting-room. She was decidedly plain. Did you ever see my cousin Theodora van Driel?"

"No," stuttered Cornelia, "not that I remember, aunt."

"And she also was a cousin of your mother's, my dear?"

Then Cornelia understood how it is that the well-bred horses of Koopstad refuse to turn their noses towards the shabby-genteel parts of the town. And she gave up trying to pierce loopholes through those blind walls of memory. She realized that family minds, like family mansions, arrange their windows so as to open on their own small court alone. And she went home, and on a small scrap of paper she wrote the following words:

"Rank discourtesy—The discourtesy of rank," and she sent them in—anonymously—to the Koopstad "Weekly Fun." But the "Weekly Fun" did not insert them.

So you see that, having grasped her fruit, she found it to be an apple of Sodom. But she was not the woman to be daunted by feline amenities. She resolved at once to force her way forward where the pleasanter method of slipping in had been denied her, and she could not long hesitate—in Koopstad—as to the means to be employed.

"Cornelia," she said to herself before her looking-glass, a day or two after the tea-drinking with Hendrik's aunt, "these people remember each other because they can boast of each other. And as soon as their connection with you affords matter for boasting, they will also remember how closely connected we are. All you have got to do, is to have better things, or at any rate finer things than they have, and they will recall the relationship. They will hate you, but that they do already. And even if they declaim against your extravagance to others, they will add: 'She is my cousin, you know.'"

"Yes, my dear," she was saying a couple of hours later to a daughter of our old friend the Cocoa-lady, now married in her turn to a sugar-planter, "I thought your little entertainment very nice—very nice. And it was good of you to ask us"—this very humbly, with downcast eyes—"I am thinking of giving a small dinner myself, you know. Oh, quite a small affair, as we have been married so short a time. Only twelve people to begin with. You had eighteen, had you not? No, I shall only ask twelve, and we must be very select. And I shall have all my flowers over from Nice; you can't get good flowers here at this time of the year."

"But won't that be very expensive?" suggested the sugar-planter's wife.

"If you want things first-rate, you must pay first-rate prices, of course," replied Cornelia, with dignified nonchalance, "but I agree with Hendrik that it's much better

to leave these things undone, if you can't do them well. Nobody can abuse you for not asking them to dinner, if you don't entertain, but they can abuse you for inviting them and then making them sit down to sweet champagne."

"I prefer champagne to be sweet," said the other lady, reddening as she recalled last Thursday's Moët and Chandon.

"I don't," said Cornelia coolly, "but that is, perhaps, a matter of taste as well as of price. Well, I shall see about my dinner-party. I must arrange the invitations with Hendrik, and I hope I shall be able to squeeze in a vacancy for you, as you were so kind as to ask us the other day. It was so sweet of you, my dear. And it was really quite a nice little entertainment, really quite pretty and nice."

"We shall none of us go to your party, so you needn't ask us," muttered the sugar-planter's wife, as soon as she was out in the street. But when ultimately the dinner was served, all the guests sat down to it. The sugar-planter's wife was not there. She had not been asked. But she had been promised an invitation to a more promiscuous gathering, when the flowers would again come from the Riviera. There were to be a good many gaities in the dull old house.

"My cousin Lossell is going to give a dinner-party," said the sugar-planter's wife to the next lady she called on. "Quite a small affair. Only twelve people. But very select. She is going to have over a quantity of roses from Nice for the occasion. Heaven knows what it will cost. Yes, she is very extravagant, undoubtedly, but that is her business, not mine. And Hendrik Lossell has plenty of money, you know, though not as much as my cousin Elias. She has promised me an invitation, and I am curious to see what a dinner at the old house will be like under the new régime. A very brilliant affair, I fancy. Yes, she is a cousin of mine. No, not only through the Lossells. Her mother was a van Pur-

mer. Before her marriage, she must have been a distant connection of ours."

And then she went on to her mother's, the Cocoa-dame's, and there the two abused Cornelia untiringly during five quarters of an hour. But they were alone, and they closed the doors. They felt that in future it would be a necessity of existence to lay bare all the faults of the intruder, but they also felt that they would do well to curtain their society windows before the vivisection began.

Cornelia was going to be a power in Koopstad. She was going to spend more money than other people. And the good city did homage in the first place to those who were known to have money, whether they spent it or not, and in the second to those who were known to spend money, even though it might be hinted that they did not possess it. And, then, there was always the vast wealth of Elias in the background. His step-brothers were his heirs. Unless he married.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE BRIDE ASKS FOR FLOWERS ON HER PATH.

"HENDRIK," said Cornelia that evening after dinner, "I have been thinking that it is quite time we began returning the civilities which have been shown us on our marriage and afterwards.

Hendrik was lying back in his easy chair, resting after the day's work at the office. He was enjoying the cosiness of the warm, well-lighted library—his father's room—and the excellence of his cigar—also one of his father's. The unique enjoyment which Hendrik Senior had allowed himself had been genuine Havannahs. And his sons had not understood till after his death what their father might mean by the reiterated saying that a man could not be altogether unhappy, as long as he still had a perfect cigar.

Hendrik Junior did not possess his father's talent for smoking, but he liked good things generally. He lay lazily stretched out in the big arm-chair, his little body lost against the dull time-stained leather, his little feet in their glazed shoes and red-striped socks forming a bright speck on the hearth-rug. He was not so diminutive, really, when you came to measure him, but the whole of the man was so thin and slight, so puny in face and feature, that you could not think of him otherwise, if you once had noticed his head and hands, than as little Hendrik Lossell.

He did not think of himself as little Hendrik Lossell.

He was proud of his hands, on account of their smallness, and he was proud of his feet for the same reason. He

sat eyeing them at this very moment, as he rested by the fire, with placid content. He was dwelling gently—in a pleasant after-dinner simmer—on his social importance and his personal attractions. He was a man of very great standing and of very small feet.

He was far more comfortable, of course, in a multiplicity of ways, since Cornelia had taken the direction of his bachelor household. He would have been so, whoever had succeeded to his mother's too-long deserted place. But Cornelia, schooled in the school of much demand and but little supply, was an excellent housekeeper, quite capable of gladdening her husband's heart with abundance of comfort and good cheer. Economical, however, she was no longer, whatever she might once have been. It could have been foreseen that the change in her circumstances must develop either increasing parsimony or extravagance. She "went for" extravagance. Her "house-money" sufficed amply for her wants, as long as the tradesmen sent in no bills. Hendrik Lossell was delighted to see how much an experienced housewife could do for comparatively little.

"It all comes of method," he declaimed. "You can do what you like if only you know how to do it. Ah, poverty is the grandest of schools, and the greatest of usurers. They say rich men get usury from their money. It's the poor that do that."

Cornelia said it was very true. And she considered they must now acknowledge such kindness as they had received.

"We sent cards around," replied Hendrik, alluding to a custom of his nation. "And we 'thanked' in the papers as well. What more would you have? I'm sure I've disburdened myself of all the gratitude I ever felt."

"You know very well I don't mean that, Hendrik," said Cornelia severely. "Everybody sends round bits of paste-board to everybody else. It would be a blessing if the whole thing were abolished."

"Have you got tired already of seeing 'Mevrouw Lossell' in print?" interrupted Hendrik with a tender glance at his larger half. "You were pleased enough with the little bits of pasteboard when I brought you them a few weeks ago."

"How silly you are, Henk," she answered kindly. She drew a chair close up to his and sat down by his side. She had too much sense of the fitness of things to risk making herself ridiculous by flopping down on the rug at his feet.

"I like the bits of pasteboard as much as ever," she said, "but there are other cards I stand more in need of just now. Cards of invitation, my dear Henk. We must begin to think of giving our first dinner-party."

How she enjoyed the last words, "Our first dinner-party!" I believe there is only one other sentence, equally short, which contains as much condensed happiness and disappointment in a worldly woman's life. "My first ball-dress!" Poor things, that is all. All, between God's Heaven above them and the shroud and banquet of worms below.

"Oh, come, not this year," expostulated Hendrik, sitting up—a hideous vision rose before his eyes of the Burgomaster's wife in her crimson satin, and the brooch with her grandfather's hair, established in the place of honour for an hour and a half, complaining that the room was too hot or too draughty. "Oh come, Cornelia, nobody will expect us to entertain already. Why, we're supposed to be still far too fond of each other, my dear, to want anybody else but ourselves."

He stretched out his hand and stroked his wife's, which lay in her lap. He had a theory that you could do what you liked with a woman if you were kind to her. More men have that theory. It all depends upon their getting the right sort of woman. If they do—oh, when they do!—their fate is sealed.

"Certainly," said Cornelia, gently pushing the hand away. "That is quite true, Hendrik, and all very well.

But, nevertheless, when you dine with other people, you must ask them back again. Most undoubtedly, you must ask them back again."

"Of course," persisted Hendrik, "but not the first year, Corry."

Have you ever noticed that when two people keep up a conversation in "exactly" and "undoubtedly" and "of course," they are always in utter contradiction and disagreement? Such words are a kind of jumping-board, on which you alight before you leap away.

Cornelia withdrew her hand altogether and looked at her husband. "My dear boy," she said, "you must allow women to be judges of these matters of etiquette. You talk as if it were a pleasure for me to take upon me all the burden and the responsibility of this dinner. Do you really think a woman likes to get one ready?"

"Yes," said Hendrik boldly."

"You know little of the worry it entails, then. To hear you, Hendrik, one would think you had always lived among the flightiest of females. Was your mother so fond of seeing company?"

Hendrik might have forced the truth a little for the sake of argument and said: "Yes," but he could not very well class his dead mother among "the flightiest of females," so he muttered: "No," and shook the ashes off his cigar.

"There, you see!" exclaimed his wife triumphantly. "You men always have your uniform little set of cut and dried axioms about women, without any regard for what you could see for yourselves. It's a little catechism you learn in the novels. If you will take the trouble to look for yourself, Henk, I will teach you what a true woman is like."

And so, having given him clearly to understand that it was not pleasure but duty she was in search of, Cornelia set herself to convince her lord and master how wrong it is to shirk duty for the sake of repose.

"Let us have them," acquiesced Hendrik at last, with a sigh of resignation, "but you need not take upon yourself all that bother you are afraid of. You have only to ask Mulder to arrange everything as it used to be. He knows all about how my mother used to order things. Her dinners were a great success, I believe."

Mulder was the family butler, who had ruled the basement for a great many years. Cornelia had retained him, as was almost inevitable, on condition that all the maid-servants should go. But the idea that he might superintend her domestic arrangements was anything but pleasing to the strong-willed lady.

"Thank you," she said sharply, showing offence for the first time that evening. "Such things can hardly be left to servants, I should say. And you must allow me to manage matters in my own way, though I have every respect for your mother's. Fashions change so much, Hendrik, as you know. If the thing is done at all, it must be done well."

"Ye—es," hesitated Hendrik. "You might have a dish or two from the pastrycook's."

Cornelia ignored this hint. As if she were going to trust her untried domestic! She would have a man-cook in upon whom she could entirely rely. But you must never harass your husband with trifles when these are only preliminaries. It's no use first tickling a man you are intending to stab.

"It will be best to order the flowers from Nice," said Cornelia, "as the Leeftlands had done the other day. Only, if we do order them, we may as well have more roses than they had. It is no use, I repeat, doing these things shabbily, and it looks so absurd to admit that the flowers have come from the South, unless they really make a show which is worthy of the journey."

"Flowers from Nice!" echoed Hendrik. "What rubbish! Why, the Leeftlands are among the richest people in Koopstad. We needn't surely compete with them."



A weaker woman than Cornelia would have burst out crying, and sobbed that she wouldn't have a party at all, no, she wouldn't, however much Hendrik might ask her. But Cornelia knew that these things are not to be done more than once, or perhaps twice, in a life-time by a wife who is older than her husband, or by one who has a Roman nose. Besides, she did not require the expedient; it is always a little humiliating, though invariably successful. She could manage without.

"It's not always the richest people who need to spend most money," she began. "You have married me, Hendrik, and now you must support me accordingly. We can afford neither ostentation nor shabbiness. But we must take our position in society, and that will depend largely on the impression we create this winter. I am going to create a good impression, I assure you. Leave things to me, and you will have every reason to be satisfied."

"My mother's position was all right," said Hendrik, annoyed, "and she didn't have flowers from abroad."

He irritated her with the constant reference to his mother. "I tell you, times alter," she cried. "Leave me in peace with your mother. Besides, the case was different. Your mother found her position ready-made."

"You need not remind me of that," said Hendrik, colouring.

"Yes, I must. For it is a fact, and I do not deny it. It would be false pride in me to do so, and I have no false pride. My mother's family was every bit as good as your mother's, but my father, I suppose, was below yours. At any rate, he had not the good fortune to marry the wealthy Margaretha Volderdoes."

"The wealth of the wealthy Margaretha Volderdoes is not mine," said Hendrik, still irritably. It was the first time that he alluded to the subject in speaking with his wife. She looked up at him quickly.

"I know that," she replied, "but I suppose that one day



it—will be. Yours and Hubert's. And, meantime, you are the head of the business. And quite rich enough, I presume."

"I am not rich," persisted Hendrik. "You saw that from the marriage-settlements."

"I know," she said, playing with her hand on the arm of his easy-chair, "that you have not as much capital at present as you are entitled to. But your income from the business must be very large, Hendrik."

"My income from the business is what poor people call very large," answered Hendrik bitterly, "and what men of business themselves call miserably small."

"He might mention the sum," thought Cornelia.

But Hendrik thought differently.

"Well," said the lady as soon as she perceived that he remained obstinately silent, "it is no wish of mine to intrude into your privacy in any way. Nor does there appear to be any reason why I should do so. But it is evident to everyone, and you will not deny it, that you can afford, and must afford, to keep up your position in this town. You need not be afraid of my falling into extravagance. I was not brought up in it, Hendrik, and you yourself have said hitherto that I managed so well."

"Yes," assented Hendrik, "that is true."

"Very well, then," she continued, following up her success, "you may be sure I shall stop short of the example of that great lady of Paris who, the *Scraps* in this week's 'Graphic' say, spent forty thousand francs on the flowers for one fête."

But her comparison overdid it, and frightened him.

"More probably an adventuress than a great lady," he said. "However, joking apart, how much do you expect them to cost?"

"I shall have to find out. But in any case, Hendrik, you must allow me an additional grant for my receptions. I cannot, of course, defray them out of the housekeeping

money. You must let me have, say, two hundred florins for this dinner——”

“Two hundred florins for a dinner!” he began.

But she swept down his voice, “And the flowers. And, then, we shall have to give a couple more, which may be slightly simpler, and an evening reception once or twice with a little music. We can’t live like hermits, Hendrik, however fond we may be of each other. The house must do as it is for this year—people will understand about our not altering it—but, when we go abroad during the summer, for our holiday, it will have to be done up. Yes, it will have to be done up and renovated altogether. There’s no denying it: it ought to have been seen to years ago. And we shall have to get new furniture—modern furniture—for the two drawing-rooms. We can leave the dining-room as it is for the present. An old-fashioned dining-room doesn’t look so bad. We can’t help ourselves. We needn’t exaggerate. But the inevitable we must do.”

She stopped. He stood on the hearthrug staring at her.

“And, Hendrik,” she added, “there is one other thing which is almost more important than any. We must have a carriage. The sooner we start it the better. It will look so marked to do it after a while.”

“Have you quite done?” he asked.

“Quite.”

“Then, look here, Cornelia, all this is foolish talk, utterly unreasonable and impossible. You have married a hard-working man, a man of business, a man whose object in life is to save money, not to waste it. We are going to live very simply, and you must make up your mind to do so. I am not unjust to you, for I never pretended to be even as rich as I am.”

“No,” she cried angrily, “you pretended to be poor. And there is nothing more dangerous—not that I married you for wealth or for poverty—than a rich man’s pretending to be poor. It writes him down a Cræsus at once.”

"There is one thing yet worse," he said quietly, "it is a poor man's—or woman's—pretending to be rich. It doesn't pay."

There was so much meaning in his tone that she looked at his face. She had avoided doing so for some time.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "You are most unjust. All Koopstad knew we were poor."

"Ask Thomas what I mean," replied Hendrik, nettled into desperate candour. He had not intended to say as much, but the strain of the moment was too strong for him. These plans of his wife's must be stopped by all means.

"I prefer to ask you, Hendrik," she said. She had risen and stood facing him.

"I mean this," he said fiercely, "that the less money is spent in this house the better. I will ring, if you will allow me, for tea."

And he stopped further altercation by summoning a servant. Cornelia stood irresolute. The great battle had been fought. Who had won it? There seemed to be heavy losses on both sides. Her husband had shown more energy than she had expected of him. Evidently, this question of money was the one on which he best knew his own mind. She must return to the charge, the sooner the better, but not before she could oversee the field. The vehemence of her emotion had brought on a sharp fit of headache, more than sufficient to justify retreat. But retreat would have been a confession of discomfiture. She wrapped herself in imperious silence as she handed her husband's tea.

And Hendrik felt stubborn and crestfallen, "sorry he had spoken," yet resolved to hold out.

It was too late to go back, for either of them. And how to go on successfully, was far from clear. The fate of all the Lossells hung in the balance, and this woman stood poising an uncertain weight in the clasp of her powerful hand.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### TREATS OF RELIGION.

AN impression of discomfort remained brooding after their quarrel over the newly-married pair. A difference of opinion between husband and wife must end in a "blow-up," if it is to end at all. And this discrepancy lay almost too deep for such a simple solution. The expenses of life we have always with us, whatever may become of its joys. And where these expenses must be borne in common, and one of twain looks at them through a telescope and the other through a microscope, the daily difficulty cannot but ultimately dim the view of both. So it was with Hendrik and Cornelia. They were not sufficiently attached to each other for either loyalty to sacrifice, once for all, his or her whole object in life to the other's unreasonable persistence; they were not so altogether indifferent to mutual regard as to remain entirely content under a consciousness of disagreement. They had not yet got beyond that stage in which you are still heartily annoyed because your partner in life will not see that it would be rational to agree with you. There is another slough, which lies much farther and much deeper, the slough of indifference or of despair.

So they lived on in that uncomfortable relation between two closely allied persons when the air is full of the silence of an everpresent preoccupation, which it were useless to allude to. And yet sometimes the subject would unavoidably push itself forward. And there were moments in which one of the two, exasperated by silent contemplation of the

other's conduct, would burst out in the full enjoyment of pent-up eloquence. Such moments were rare, however, and they were not of the kind which bring peace in their train. For Cornelia was resolved not to "save and scrape," and Hendrik consistently refused to "waste."

The lady, it must be admitted, had the stronger position, for it is always easier to let loose than to restrain. If she chose to spend money, it was difficult to keep her from doing so, for all Koopstad would give her credit, and she simply ordered and did not pay. Hendrik Lossell soon understood that, although she might be a methodical housewife, the credit system was undoubtedly at the bottom of her method. And to check her in this course he would have been compelled to seek for aid in a publicity which to him would have seemed worse than any evil she could do him. So the dinner-party took place, and was followed by a series of festivities. Cornelia resolutely and quietly put her foot down, and sent round the man with her orders and her invitations. She was not unreasonable. She had married a husband with a large income, and she was not going to live on a small one.

"He loves money," she said to herself with infinite scorn. "He makes a lot of it, and then he puts it aside. For shame! like Harpagon, he loves money for its own sake—in piles!" She did not love money. She only loved money's worth.

Yes, Hendrik Lossell loved money. But he did not love it, as his wife believed, for its own bare, glittering sake alone. He had always respected it, from his earliest youth upwards, as the one god who is worshipped in Koopstad, and when a child he had looked up with timid reverence to the great portal of its temple, the Exchange, which none but the initiated might enter. Those memories of childish veneration never quite die away from our hearts, and he must indeed have been scared by the flame of a desperate career who can recall what was deemed holy in the old

home without a dim admission that it is holy still. But Hendrik, in the smooth flow of his life through the washed and tidied streets of Koopstad, had never found cause to break away from the overshadowing solemnity of the state-religion. The state-religion was Cæsar. And he brought unto Cæsar the things which were Cæsar's, cheerfully. He had never heard—not even when he was confirmed upon reaching the requisite age—of God and the things which are God's.

He loved money, because the man who does not love money is a Socialist, and a Socialist is a Nihilist, and a Nihilist is an Atheist. And an Atheist is a man who has no religion. Therefore, the love of money being the root of all religion, he loved money because he was a religious man.

He loved it with a humble, tranquil veneration of its majesty, recognising it gratefully as the sheet-anchor of that respectability which, to him, represented the good ship of state. To Cornelia it was merely a source of personal enjoyment—either of what you yourself possessed, as manifested, for instance, in the purchase of pine-apples—or of what your neighbours lacked, as exemplified when your pine-apples were bigger than anybody else's. To Hendrik it was a wondrous beneficent Omnipotence, enthroned in all that is not only great, but also good, the enemy of the improper, the improvident, the tattered, the discontented, in a word, the one tangible bulwark against the chaos of the anti-cosmos. He could not have reasoned it out, perhaps, but to him and to his co-religionists the god of the Cosmos, its originator and its upholder, was gold. He was not altogether unreasonable, surely. The original King may have been Love, but his subjects have deposed him.

If they can.

Cornelia's love, then, was a merely animal affection, based on the passions. Hendrik's was a far higher spiritual admiration, growing forth from a man's calm appreciation of objective good.



You cannot quite fathom the depth of his feeling, unless you live in Koopstad. But, very probably, you do.

The passion of money-making, however, the religious enthusiasm of the thing, had first come upon him after his father's death. Till then he had received his allowance, and not thought much about the matter, except that it was a good thing his father was rich. But the discovery which had followed Hendrik Senior's demise had brought home in quite a different manner—by comparison of absence—the value of wealth to Hendrik Junior's mind. Old Elias Volderdoes's will changed the whole man, not by altering his character, but by suddenly sobering and hardening it down at the early age of nineteen. Still a boy, a precocious boy, such as these young city-chaps are apt to be, but a boy, nonetheless, he found himself placed, as soon as the law would grant him license, face to face with the great difficulties and yet greater responsibilities of his position as practical head of the house. The position was an unjust one, cruelly unjust, for all the dead weight of work and anxiety pressed heavy upon his shoulders, while the fruits of his labour dropped from his hand into others, into hands which were too weak to retain the treasure and let it sink in a useless mass upon the ground. This sensation of futile work,—not so much of work done for another, as of futile work, for the fast collecting heap of dull gold would probably pour into his pockets in the end, when it was too late,—had roused all the energies of his nature into dogged opposition. He was an irritable but unimaginative man, one of the coarsely materialistic yet intensely nervous organizations of this age of railway engines. And to suggest injustice to him, was to exasperate him into restless resistance. For it is a tendency of our time that men can no longer brook the slightest injustice or oppression. When they experience them.

But in many ways, undeniably, Lossell's lot, such as cir-

cumstances had fashioned it, was a hard one, and it could almost be said that he had a right to rebel against it. He resolved to alter it. And his resolve soon grew upon him, with the daily pressure of his wrongs, into that intensity of purpose which shrinks back from no sacrifice, if needs be, from no crime. For there is nothing that breeds injustice like impatience of injustice.

Fifteen per cent. of the profits of the business were his, fifteen per cent. were Hubert's, the remaining seventy belonged to the shareholders, as yet to the unique shareholder, Elias. But it will be remembered that Hendrik had insisted on acquiring the right to purchase shares at a fair price from his idiot step-brother. And as long as Elias was considered responsible for his actions, there could be nothing to hinder the shares being thus disposed of. In fact, it was the one way out of the dilemma, as Alers had immediately understood.

Hendrik set himself then, heart and soul, to the acquiring of these shares. All that he wanted, to become master of the business, was capital to buy out the useless sleeping-partner, but it would be a long time ere he could command the large sums required for such an operation. Before Hubert had left for Shanghai, it had been settled that the shares were, for the next few years, to be estimated at a hundred and fifty-seven per cent. Hubert himself had bought a couple before his marriage, not since. Hendrik's one object of existence was to scrap money together and buy more.

During the first few years after his father's death he had gradually dropped all those expensive tastes and habits which Koopstad dutifully nurtures in her richer sons. He cared for nothing now in which he could not foresee, through an intermediate vista of money-making, a nearer approach to the goal he was aspiring after. And so his whole soul went out to a passion of gold-getting, as a racer tears over the ground, not for the sake of the sand beneath his feet,

but for the sake of that little flag at the end. *His* little flag was the mastery of Volderdoes Zonen. But his approach to it could hardly be compared to a rush over a race-course. It was a struggle uphill.

He fought himself in all his little foibles, and conquered them. He smoked cheaper cigars—not a little thing, O daughters of Koopstad!—he crushed down his taste for good French wines (and he had it); he caused his tailor to lift hands of deprecatory horror by sending a light summer-coat to be dyed. Somebody says this is nonsense. The somebody has forgotten all about when he was nineteen, or he has never had a light summer-coat.

And so he saved money. It's only the business-man who knows that every little tells. How he knew it! How he thought over it and worked it out. His one pleasure had become to sit of evenings over his account-books, reckoning again and again his chances of profit and loss. His gains for the year would probably amount to so much. His expenses to so much. There would be so much left, then, towards the share-buying. He hardly had time to notice in between that his mother died.

And in all this he was upright and straightforward. His mind was set square on its course. He had understood immediately, after the first temptation and its defeat by Hubert, that the shares must be honestly worked for and earned. He had no wish to obtain them by other means from Elias. He set himself to obtain them thus. And his one comfort was that the day would come at last, when he would know that he was lord of the great house of business, in reality and not only in name, and when he could declare the fact before men.

Yes, he must be able to declare it before men. And therefore, above all, there must be no underhand dealing. The brothers had left their father's notary, but they had betaken themselves to another of equal standing. And the necessary "procurations" relative to the administration of

Elias's property had been made out with all due precision and legal propriety. It could all bear inspection by anyone who might choose to inquire into it. The best experts had been called in to settle the price of the shares. All Koopstad might know that Elias's step-brothers were slowly buying him out at that price. It was essential that Koopstad should know it. And that, ultimately, it should know of their success. Life, perhaps, was not worth living, but that moment of life was worth living for.

And, then, suddenly, he married Cornelia. A fortune! The news had dawned upon him with one encircling flash of thought, not subsequent but simultaneous. Such fortune meant, by no means the realization of his plans, yet a great step towards it. For, if once such a share in the business had passed into his hands, the increase to his income resulting from it would easily enable him to make further purchases. It would, above all, give him an immense advance upon Hubert, who had married a poor girl out yonder, all for love and loneliness. To get the start of Hubbie was a great thing for Henkie. He was furiously jealous of Hubbie, his partner, his brother, and, therefore, his rival.

All this stood out in clear light upon his mind the very moment he first heard from Alers the story of the lottery-prize. He liked Cornelia. He resolved at once, to combine duty and pleasure in marrying Cornelia and her money. Which represented duty? And which pleasure? He hardly knew. A little of both, perhaps, was to be found in each.

A man who thought and hoped as he did might have been expected to hang back as soon as he discovered the error into which he had been trapped. But to think this of him was not to know him well. Undoubtedly his first impulse, as we have seen, was to cut the cords and free himself. But he desisted as soon as he perceived that the cords were drawn too tight. For, if it be true that gold was his god, we have seen that it was respectable gold. He was not

a false-coiner. He clung to that outer respectability which is of the very essence of money. For money has always been the maximum of the genteel to the many; that is why they stamp it with the heads of Kings. The number has ever been a restricted one of those who know the difference between snobs and common people, or Kings and gentlemen, but coppers and counters no ten-year-old boy will confuse.

The number is small, but it has always existed. And it is loud-voiced. Hendrik Lossell was afraid of public opinion. Public opinion, when it turns to the right, is usually the opinion of a chosen resolute few. Hendrik knew that these few go about in the city even unto this day, as the prophets of Jehovah went about among the children of Baal.

He saw—also in a moment; he was a man of slow impulse and quick decision—he saw that he could no longer go back. And he went on. In one word: His cult was not the cult of gold. It was the cult of social weight. It was not, as had been the case with old Elias, and to a certain extent with Hendrik Senior, the impersonal cult of Volderdoes Zonen. For the firm itself, to him, was chiefly a means towards an end. His father had sacrificed his life to the idea of commercial probity, honesty with regard to his unfortunate son, the heir of the house of Volderdoes. He would have liked the boy to die, but he could not cheat him. Not even under the stress of disastrous speculations. There was some small chance of Hendrik Junior's cheating, if only he could feel certain that he would never be found out.

At present, however, he had not the slightest wish to cheat. He was willing to work, to work hard. And every fresh thousand that came rolling, wave-like, into the dead sea of Elias's fortune he conscientiously invested in Dutch Consols, where it lay uppermost till another wave fell a-top of it. It never had to wait long.

And he scraped, and saved, and was happy in hope. And then, you see, he married Cornelia.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MUSIC AND DISCORD.

AND having married Cornelia somewhat against his will, he was delighted and cheered by the discovery of her talent for housekeeping. The discovery took a load off his mind. True, he had expected that she would have thrifty habits, but he had not known whether she would combine economy with comfort. "After all," he had said to himself in those first days of his engagement, "it is cheaper, on the long run, to marry a poor girl than a rich one." He was delighted to see his sophism assume such an appearance of good-sense. There is no sensation on earth more enjoyable than to find one's favourite sophism come true.

He actually grew quite fond of his stately wife. And it vexed him to be obliged to disapprove of her conduct. But she soon disappointed him in the very expectations he had most fondly cherished. It was too bad that Cornelia, of all women, should prove extravagant.

"It would be too bad," said Cornelia to herself continually, "to marry a large income and live on a small one."

Some husbands can let slip a virtue or two in their wives without noticing much difference. They have plenty to lose. But the bottom of the basket had always remained more or less plainly visible to Hendrik Lossell's eyes.

He was coming leisurely downstairs to his late breakfast on Sunday morning. Sunday to him, as a rule, was a day on which to transact such private business as he could find



no time for in the week. He would look over his personal accounts and read the weekly survey of the Stock Exchange, and he would write the few uncommercial letters which circumstances might require. He was member of a couple of committees, like every Dutchman, high or low, and these gave him a little desultory occupation of the gently satisfactory sort. One of them was devoted to Charity Organization. He did not believe in charity, but he believed in organizing it into a minimum of charitableness. He was one of their best men.

In spite of his small respect for the Sabbath, he involuntarily experienced its reposeful influence. To begin with, there never was any hurry about getting up on this first day of the week. And on that account, doubtless, as well as through the absence of the customary peals at the servants' entrance, a holy calm permeates the houses and skins even of those who would be most unwilling to acknowledge a day of rest. In France and Germany, for instance, it is not the pleasure-making which swamps the idea of Sunday half as much as the continuance of work. You look out of window, and there is the butcher at the door, and the bricklayer opposite is spreading his mortar. Poor fellows! they are enlightened members, probably, of their "Free-thought Society," and this evening they will prove to you, with impassioned eloquence, that Christianity has conferred no benefits on mankind.

Hiendrik Lossell had had time to shave leisurely. And that, in itself, is always indicative of peace of body and mind. The scene upon which he looked forth from his bedroom-window was tranquil, but, then, it was always that. The house stood in its own small patch of ground, at some distance from the road, with a carriage-sweep in front of it. Nobody ever passed it except the people who couldn't help doing so.

He had drawn on his coat carefully—he was not one of the men who wear Sunday coats. And he had thoughtfully

put back his watch and his loose change and other trifles into his pockets, instead of making a grab at the whole lot, as on week-days.

He had dressed alone, for Cornelia, who detested loitering, had gone downstairs an hour before. Cornelia was never half-awake. You could imagine that she woke up with her boots laced.

And so he stole downstairs, enjoying the slowness of his movements, the dapper little man. He was going to have a quiet day of it. The only thing he regretted was the hitch in his intercourse with Cornelia. Perhaps he might go and see Elias again, once in a way. He did not often go and see Elias. But since his silent quarrel with his wife, he felt himself more drawn at times towards his elder brother.

As he proceeded step by step across the little half-way landing, he heard voices down in the entrance-hall, and, looking over the banisters, he saw his wife in eager conversation with a gentleman, whom he immediately recognized.

"I cannot do it, if you stick to that price," the fair Cornelia was saying with majestic eagerness; "I am sure you are very expensive, Herr Pfuhl."

Hendrik understood at once that a fresh plot was being hatched against his repose of soul. For the personage who was paying his wife so early a morning call was the director of the Orchestra which provided all the high-class music of Koopstad. Herr Pfuhl was one of those people who always make the impression upon you of standing in need of being pulled together and buttoned up. He was a loose, flabby, untidy sort of man, with a round face and figure, red cheeks and tie, and shiny head and spectacles. The aforesaid full moon on his occiput was bordered at the lower side by a fringe of straggling, wispy dust-coloured locks, and when he bowed his fat little body, as he incessantly did, you caught yourself wondering how it was possible for a ball to cave in like that unless it was hollow. Need it be added

after this that he bit his nails? That one fact ought to have incapacitated him for his profession. But he was a magnificent musician, and some people considered this a compensation.

"What is expensive?" cried Hendrik quickly. He hung over the banisters as far as he could reach.

Cornelia started—internally. She looked up calmly enough. Herr Pfuhl looked up also. And as the round red face and the thin pale face were lifted towards him, Hendrik thought to himself: "she is really quite handsome! How well she carries her head!"

"I was asking Herr Pfuhl," she said sweetly, "what would be his price for a musical evening. It would be such a good idea to give a small concert, I thought. But his price is beyond me. I think he ought to do it for less."

For, although she was as magnificent in her views as the most penniless fortune-hunter, she could haggle and cut down like the wealthiest daughter of Israel.

"But Mevrouw is dragging me the skin over the ears," protested the Director. He spoke no language at all. He had forgotten his own, and had never learned Dutch. "And she ignores that I cannot play my pieces with one half the performers and leave the others to make musics in the streets. It is not a band, Himmelkreuzsacrament, and my price is "fixe" like in the big bazaars. And you do not pay half-seat in the concert neither, because you please to go away in the middle." He looked up again to Mynheer Lossell as if appealing for help. He got it.

Hendrik ran down a flight more stairs, and paused at a distance of a few steps from the bottom.

"I quite agree with you, Herr Pfuhl," he said. "There will be no music. Most certainly there will be no music. We cannot afford to pay for it, and therefore we will not have it."

But this answer conciliated neither party. Nor did he intend it to do so. The Orchestra-Director had quite ex-

pected to secure his engagement, for he had perceived that Mevrouw's heart was set upon the matter, but he had hoped that Mynheer would prove malleable with regard to the price, as is the manner of men.

"Not but that I should be gracious to give the concert," he began—he meant gratified—"for, arranged as Mevrouw would intend it, it would be a beneficent precedent in the city, still I must consider—"

"It is not a question of affording or not affording," interrupted Cornelia hastily. "Mynheer agrees with me, you see, Herr Pfuhl, that your price is too high. Only he puts it differently."

"Yes, the price is too high," cried Lossell, slightly raising his voice, "and lucky the man who finds that out before paying. With some things you can't, Herr Pfuhl. And then you must make the best of a bad business, Herr Pfuhl. It's a very fine thing, is music, Herr Pfuhl, but sometimes you get tired of a tune. And, although you can't always stop the music when you want to, you can always leave off dancing to it, I believe, Herr Pfuhl. Don't you think that one can?"

"It is not for dancing," replied Herr Pfuhl confusedly, "but for a concert of instrumentals, as I understand."

"The principle remains the same," cried Lossell. "Keep out of expenses while you can."

"But don't, if you can't," interrupted Cornelia tartly.

Till now her husband had resolutely fastened his eyes upon the orchestra-director's shining rotundity. He withdrew them for a moment—less than a moment—as Cornelia spoke; and their glances met. In that tenth of a second a big battle was fought and lost, far more decisive than the wordy dispute of the other night. For Hendrik read defiance in Cornelia's look, and retreated before it. In that flash of recognition he resolved to give up all attempts to browbeat her. His must be a warfare not of the broadsword, but of the stiletto. There lay discomfiture in the

swift admission, not defeat as yet, but repulse. Once more Cornelia's eagle face had stood her in good stead. "After all, I can't slap her," muttered Lossell to himself, as he scowled back towards Herr Pfuhl's bald head.

Indeed, he could not.

"'Can't' is an ugly word," he said, to himself almost as much as to her, and he walked away in the direction of the breakfast-room. In the entry he turned round. "No concert this winter, Herr Pfuhl!" he cried, and then he shut the door quickly behind him.

He was still sufficiently master of his own house to say what he chose in it. But he was not master enough to remain where he chose, after having said it.

He was far from sorry to think the door should be shut.

The repose of the Sabbath—that blessed resting on the oars—had been broken by a sudden squall. He glowered discontentedly at the breakfast-things, and, as he lifted the teapot-lid, he sneered down upon the innocent brown liquid inside. Yet Cornelia could make good tea. And he knew it. It is a beautiful thing in a woman.

No man of nervous or artistic temperament should bind himself in wedlock before the partner of his choice has passed an examination in tea-making. And even in Koopstad there are nervous souls, though inartistic, in these days of ours when Time travels only by rail. Hendrik was of a highly nervous nature, irritable and fifty miles an hour. He sat down to breakfast and drew the Sunday morning paper towards him. Cornelia might as well stop away as not. How unreasonable she was, and how inconsiderate! He would walk out presently and see Elias. The walk would do him good and brace him up a bit. Elias was his brother—a step-brother, but still a brother, a Lossell. Blood is thicker than water, and every now and then the old truth comes home to you. And Cornelia was fast deepening into a nuisance.

She came in, serene, as if nothing had happened. Her



victory satisfied her for the moment, and she was too wise a woman not to relax her hold of the rope, the moment she had drawn the boat into her current. She had shown Hendrik the limit of her endurance, and instead of leaping over it, he had shivered back. That was enough for to-day. She did not really want the concert very badly, especially not at that "scandalous" price.

"I quite agree with you, Henk," she said mildly, as she busied herself with her tray, "and I have told Herr Pfuhl so and sent him away. It would be absurd to pay so much for his band, and we can, in any case, very well wait till next year."

Hendrik's whole being melted away into notes of interrogation and admiration, as he stopped and stared at his wife, the open print in one hand, his half-lifted tea-cup in the other.

"We must give an extra dinner instead," continued Mevrouw. "Why did you not wait for me to pour out your tea, Hendrik?"

"I am in a hurry," answered Lossell, still bewildered, "I want to walk out to Elias's and see how the poor chap is getting on."

Mevrouw pulled a face. She did not like to think of the useless idiot who stood between her and her full glory of greatness. Elias was her permanent eclipse. "Oh, depend upon it, he is perfectly well and happy," she snapped. She avoided as much as possible allowing her thoughts to dwell upon contingencies, but she could not keep down an undercurrent of exasperation at sight of the idiot's unbroken health. "It is only the people whose existence has no *raison d'être*," she said, "that go on living forever."

"So-o," muttered Herr Pfuhl to himself emphatically, in a long-drawn reminiscence of his native land. He hurried down the short avenue in fretful jumps, and, as he went, he struck his greasy wide-awake down flat on his



speckled cabinet-pudding of a head. "So is it in the great houses. They have the butters and the oils of life, and yet the wheels go creaking. The Mefrou, ah, she will have her concert when she wants it. Not so was my Lieschen. Never has she given me Blutwurst again, since I told her it was Leberwurst I loved better. And yet Blutwurst was her Leibgericht."

Whenever he was strongly moved, his German seemed to break forth again purer from some hidden spring of feeling and to come surging up across the muddy ditch of broken Dutch.

A film spread over his eyes, for Lieschen would never eat Blutwurst again. She had been dead for many years. She had died in the strange, straight-lined country, of a chill at the heart.

Peace be to the old Director's ashes. He, too, is dead. But his orchestra was heard in Mevrouw Lossell's rooms, before he laid down his bâton. And on that memorable occasion Hendrik Lossell went up to him, with nervous, puckered face, and complimented him on the excellence of the performance, adding, with a palpable sneer, that there were some things so valuable you could never pay enough for them.

And the sneer was at himself.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A PRINCE AMONG PAUPERS.

To Elias life was one long Sabbath. The dim hush of a cathedral-chapel. The long-drawn, mournful sweetness of organ-tones that sink to rest.

For the full blaze of life and the full burst of life, the heart's sunshine and the mind's proud clamour of activity, these could never be but partially aroused, where the avenues of sight and sound remained blocked.

Yet he was happy in the stillness—in the half-light of his existence. As he looked down the long vista of monotonous years, he lost count, if ever he had been able to retain it, and, dully as he remembered a time when he was happier still, because less hampered in enjoyment, the recollection conveyed to him no conception of a "nevermore." That phase, though not present with him at the moment, was a perpetual reality. He regretted it no more than a child regrets this morning's breakfast in the presence of this evening's tea. For all that, it may prefer the earlier meal. Elias knew that all things, good and evil, have their times of coming and going, yet the thread of existence was tangled round his brain in the form neither of a ragged scrap—cut at both ends—(as with us) nor of a harmonious circle (as with the philosophers) but of an ellipse (as, I presume, with other fools). That which was, and that which is and that which shall be blended together—it has already been pointed out—into a unity of consciousness. The consciousness of love, which is impulse, and that steadfast

calm of regret which is love inadequate or love misunderstood.

It is very difficult to present a distinct picture of Elias's "clouded intellect" to intellects unclouded, which have always been aware that, if to-day is the 31st of December, the 30th must have immediately preceded it, while to-morrow will be New Year's Day, when the old year will be definitely dead. But it doesn't matter. We can skip Elias; and yet the story, I flatter me, will remain interesting still, for Hendrik Lossell was very wide-awake and unclouded, and able to do any amount of mental arithmetic, connected with tea. Besides, there is a murder later on, if you care to get so far, just as there is in this morning's "Police." Elias Lossell is uninteresting, but he cannot help it. He is only a fool, and not even a titled one. Had he lived in England and had his florins been pounds sterling, he would probably, as eldest son of the late merchant prince, his father, have been Sir Elias Lossell, or even, perhaps, Lord Taycaddy. And the Honourable Henk and the Honourable Hub would have been more honourable than they can ever hope to be now or henceforth. And Elias would have been interesting, although belonging to a not uncommon class. But all that is impossible. There never was a Baron took to trade in Holland yet, neither in tea nor in cotton nor in anything else, excepting the seven pearls of his coronet. The Lossells and their friends would have laughed me to scorn, had I pretended, out of deference to my readers' feelings, that Elias was a Baron. He was not. And as his name has unfortunately been dragged out of the quiet corner where it shone serenely in the hearts of the few who knew and loved him into the glare of literary notoriety, it must now remain for ever inscribed on the long roll of the Circulating Libraries as a probably unique example of a hero of modern story who stands forth as an unutterable, and nonetheless an untitled, fool.

His folly was without any alleviation, and also without any excuse.

And yet he was interesting enough in his own circle of Koopstad, was my poor Elias. How interesting he was came out plainly on the occasion of his brother's marriage. As a rule, Elias lived away in his modest house and garden outside the town. He never entered the narrow, traffic-tormented streets. You could meet him, with his faithful Johanna or a manservant, occasionally, if you went for long walks in the fields, but few people in Koopstad have time to go walking. It was not time that he lacked, and he loved these wide wanderings into the vast recesses of Nature, even though he could not peer and poke, as you and I can, into her unfathomed mysteries. Probably what most delighted him in these walks was the consciousness of using his strength. Evidently, he could not ride or shoot or run. But he could walk, on an attendant's arm, away into the immeasurable distance, on and on, until he came home—blessed sensation—healthily tired. Johanna, strong and hearty, and comely as ever, could force herself to accompany her darling. And when the rage of inexhaustibleness fell upon him, as it sometimes would, well, then, Johanna must stay where she was, and John must go instead. There was only one Johanna, but—alas—there was a frequent variation of Johns. They never succeeded in getting a manservant who could resist the continual temptation to steal from Elias. For Elias sanctioned every theft.

He would seldom talk, as he proceeded on his way through the sweet sights and smells and sensations of a summer day. The smells and sensations were with him, whatever might become of the sights and sounds. They were with him in such a degree that he could often tell through what plantations of trees or what fields of grain they were passing, not merely by stopping to feel with his

hand, but by distinguishing a variety of odours which "John" declared to be the same unprofitable "country smell." He was always most anxious to know what birds were singing. "Do you hear them?" "What birds are they?" he would ask over and over again. And the John of the moment usually answered: Finches. Elias would fly into sudden furies of futile disappointment over that unaltering reply. A couple of Johns had been sent away for not being able to distinguish between finches and blackbirds, and that was a pity, for it took a long time to accustom a new man to Elias's strange forms of conversation. And the whole thing was after all more a theory than a reality with him, for he knew nothing of the notes of birds, and became perfectly happy with a servant who had the cuteness to vary his random replies. But the afflicted man clung to the idea—all the more on account of its shadowiness; he made most of what little he could possess, and to hear him talk glibly about the trees in his garden, you would hardly have thought he knew only a couple of dozen of the commonest kinds. And even of these he could not remember where they stood, as so many blind men can. It was the same with the corn in the fields, he must have some assistance from touch or smell. But Johanna, who helped him in these things to the uttermost, contended—to strangers—that of late the senses he still possessed had developed under continual use. He could now distinguish the places where his different flowers were planted by smelling and feeling them. They were purposely put in patches or broad borders of the same species. It was a great pleasure to him to feel his way down to them alone, and to pick with his own hand and blend in a bouquet such selections as he might be desirous to make.

But it was in accordance with the whole bent of his crooked mind that he could not realize the fact that one servant should go and another should take his place. They were all "John" to him, for so the first one had been called.

And they were obliged to acquiesce in the fiction. On the whole, they had a good time of it, as long as it lasted. Nothing much was required of them, except a pair of elastic legs. For Johanna retained with jealous hands the personal care over her "Jasje," as she still occasionally called him, and the man who was rash enough to encroach upon her privileges might as well advertise for another place at once. They danced attendance on a master whose pockets were always full of small change, which he scattered, indiscriminately, to any beggars who cared to accept it, and a good many of these pieces naturally would find their way into the valet's itching palm. Johanna had in vain done all she could to persuade her charge not to take money with him on his walks, except when she could accompany him. He had refused, peremptorily, obstinately refused—an unusual thing with him. He had reminded her that it had been his first—almost his only—stipulation when his brothers told him he was rich, that he must have a certain sum to give away. He had begged for it, cried for it; Hubert had accorded it to him. It was only a thousand florins (about eighty pounds), a mere drop from the ocean. And every day he took with him a hundred copper cents in each side-pocket, and gave them away anyhow, like a fool. Hendrik "administered" the rich man's charities, nothing exaggerating and nothing setting down unseen. On the lists which went the round of all the great houses he wrote the substantial name of "Volderdoes Zonen" opposite large, fat, respectable sums. And the gentlemen who brought the lists were very much obliged to Hendrik Lossell.

They sometimes ventured to hint, however, that his step-brother's indiscriminate scattering of pennies was a nuisance, and a hindrance to the proper organization of relief. The burgomaster, duly enlightened by his parish officers, complained that Elias was "pauperizing the poor." It was true. The children of the neighbouring villages be-



gan to look out for and waylay him. Hendrik shrugged his shoulders. He regretted it. So did the Johns. And therefore they took Elias's pennies away from him, when they could, and kept them. It was not very difficult to do so, for he easily lost count.

Burgomaster's "Tibbie" (Matthias), having a passion for sweet-stuff, when sticky, had also hit upon the ingenious expedient of tracking the blind man and stopping him for a copper. The first time he did it very timidly; the second he was quite bold and impatient. For evidently Elias, unless warned by his John (who had instructions to do so, but evaded them), was incapable of knowing you wanted money, unless you pulled him by the coat-tails. The village children would adopt that expedient, or roll in the dust across his path. They scampered off, if they saw Johanna with "the fool." Elias got no thanks for his well-intentioned largesse; he was always "the fool" to them. They thought him a fool for giving them coppers without cause.

Johanna, having suspected "Tibbie," caught him one day by peeping round a corner. She told somebody who told somebody else, and—Solomon being considered altogether "out of it" in Holland as regards "pedagogy"—the Burgomaster punished his greedy offspring by condemning him to complete deprivation of pudding for the next six weeks.

It was Elias's fault. Most certainly it was. Nobody will deny it. But the Burgomasteress, as she sat sadly gazing upon her puddingless darling at table, hyper-realized, perhaps, how much Elias was to blame. And she told everybody. And everybody pitied her, and the poor harmless child, and the Burgomaster's responsibility, and the weight of work imposed upon the parish officers and the church-charity fund. And everybody said that desultory giving was a crying evil, and that it "pauperized the poor," and they only wished they had some of Elias Lossell's useless

money, and why didn't he give it to them, if he didn't know what to do with it?

And he ought to be locked up.

His reputation, therefore, was at a very low ebb when he suddenly appeared among the Koopstaders on the occasion of Hendrik Lossell's wedding. Hubert was away in China; other near relations there were none. Elias, the head of the family, must represent it. He could not be one of the two witnesses—groomsmen—whom Dutch law requires for either of the contracting parties, but he must appear in the "family circle" nevertheless. He expressed his readiness—nay, his eagerness—to do so, though he had not been near the bustling city for years. As a rule he shrank painfully from the society of men more favoured than he—and who was not? Walled up in the loneliness of his small spot of tranquil sunlight, he would repeat constantly to Johanna the saw her devotion—or her selfishness—had taught him: "Two's company, three's none." But one day, suddenly, he stopped himself. "Am I one, Johanna?" he asked, with a troubled expression of face.

"Yes," she told him.

"I can't understand it," he murmured, shaking his head. "Seems to me I'm company, and two. I'm always thinking of Elias Lossell, and talking to Elias Lossell, and I love Elias Lossell very much. Who is the I, Johanna, that is Elias Lossell's friend?"

Johanna could not answer him. She knew about the old Adam, and the new man, as treated—abstractly—in church. Some vague idea that these might come in useful floundered across her brain. But she did not feel able to cope with them, and therefore she confined herself to telling Elias that he must not love himself more than he loved her, his poor old nurse, who doted on him. Elias promised not to.

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A few days later he burst upon the astonished gaze of Koopstad. Hendrik's wedding, with its elements of wonder, amusement and complaint, would naturally awaken considerable curiosity. The large Church of St. John—"Jack's," they call it in Koopstad, as elsewhere in Holland, for the Dutch are by nature religious, but not reverent—"Jack's" was crowded with a fashionable crowd, that nodded and smiled, and talked in more than a whisper and kept on its hat till the service began. All the clan of Hendrik's relations were there, come to see their dear cousin make an exhibition of himself, and rejoicing that it should be so, although annoyed by the thought of the fortune which would become his some day. And the Alerses, for their part, spread themselves out over the sacred building which to them, at that moment, was a very temple of Mammon. It was not everybody that got married at "Jack's." And some of the Alerses—cousins, female, of course, and very young—felt conscious of a futile hope—the outcome of envy gone demented—that at the last moment Cornelia might still possibly come to grief.

"There are a number of people here," grumbled Cousin Cocoa's lesser half to his sovereign lady, "who have no reason for coming at all. As if it were not bad enough to be dragged to a wedding on compulsion."

"You may be certain, my dear Titus," replied our old friend Amelia (in a new lilac bonnet, and therefore not unhappy, though ashamed of her cousin), "that when a church is as crowded as this, the wedding is sure to be an ill-assorted one."

"And royal weddings, then?" faintly ventured the cocoa-man.

"Royal weddings are always ill-assorted," answered Amelia, whose domestic religion consisted in having the last word.

When Dutch bridal couples enter the church, they

have already been civilly married before the registrar, and the bride invariably comes up the aisle on her husband's arm. There had been a general consensus among the ladies that Cornelia would look "hideous," "ghastly"—or what is the correct adjective which a pretty woman applies to a plain one? Oh, of course; you could make up your mind about that. But, when she walked calmly up between the broad borders of skeptically smiling faces (she had on flat shoes for the occasion, and little Henky high-heeled boots), she disappointed them all. "She was not half bad," said the men, "serenely self-conscious, and with a queenly look about her." The women dropped smiles of vinegar into their watery praise: "She looks ever so much younger than she is," they tittered. "She looks almost as young as her husband."

Immediately after the happy pair came Elias, leading—or, rather, led by—Cornelia's married sister, the lady of the widower, the six step-children and the sixty thousand florins. As he emerged from the entrance into the full glare of the vast, white-walled, white-windowed barn-like building, a thrill of interest—a genuine impulse of spontaneous excitement—ran swiftly through the ruffles and laces and simpers and even penetrated to the yawns. Many of those present had not seen Elias since he was a boy; few had seen him otherwise than once or twice from a carriage, when they passed him on some quiet road, where he stood, half-averted, under a slouch-hat which hid his face.

But now, suddenly, he came among them; he passed along their serried lines, where outstretched hands could touch him, his blindness uplifted in the vulgar light of their little day. He followed imperceptibly the guiding of the woman by his side. That evening-dress which the Dutch still commonly wear at weddings and which is not nearly so unbecoming, after all, as some enthusiasts would have us believe (the man who looks like a waiter in a white tie, will look like a groom in a red one), that evening-dress, which,

like most other much-maligned evils, survives all attacks, sat easily and not ungracefully on Elias's massive frame. The fair curls fell in a bright flood over his shoulders, and the beard—no razor had ever touched it—now lay soft and silky on the manly chest. His golden fairness wrapped the blind man's head in an aureole of sunlight; he walked erect, with a tranquil purity over his even features, and, as he turned to take his seat in the half circle of relations which Dutch etiquette groups around the two principal personages, his sightless eyes shone forth in all their fathomless unconsciousness—as cloud-veiled lakes of dark transparency—upon the Alereses and the Lossells and all their roots and fruits and branches, upon Koopstad, moneyed and mercantile, majestic, meritorious and mean.

“Lord bless us!” murmured a meagre old cousin in black satin, one of those cousins we are all afraid of and venerate, because she can leave her money where she likes. She closed her thin hands tightly over her gold-clasped hymn-book, and her chin shook. The younger ladies of Koopstad did not exchange satirical glances. They were looking at Elias. Everybody had forgotten the bride.

They were looking at Elias. Everyone was looking at Elias. At the back of the church, and in corners and along the walls people had got up and were standing discreetly on tiptoe and craning their necks between intervening shoulders and over agitated heads. There was something uncanny about the apparition of this sunless Baldur, that struck their admiration cold. They gazed at him in alarm and reproach, for he was of their own race and yet outside them, but they gazed, fixedly, unintermittently, as he sank into his seat. Very few of them saw Hendrik stumble over the footstool prepared for his bride. And still fewer saw Cornelia's impatient frown. They were not thinking of Cornelia. They were thinking of, and looking at, Elias.

And suddenly Elias remembered, with a shock of self-rebuke, that he was in church. He had not been in church

for innumerable years. He sank forward abruptly on his knees and, speaking out aloud into his own unbroken silence words which he believed to be entirely inaudible, but which rang clear and low through the sacred edifice in the subdued tones of his bell-like voice, he said :

“Dear God, bless Hendrik and Cornelia. And bless me. And Hubert out in China. And make everybody happy and good.”



## CHAPTER XXV.

### ELIAS SLAYS HIS TEN THOUSANDS.

NEXT day a number of the young ladies of Koopstad were quietly but resolutely in love with Elias Lossell.

"It is a ruinous pity," remarked Hendrik's Aunt Theresa, the same who afterwards initiated Cornelia into the mysteries of clanship, "it's enough to make any mother cry her eyes out, and such things ought not to be allowed. Idiots oughtn't to be born to such fortunes as that, and then left irretrievably single. If they can't marry, I consider their money ought to be taken from them and given to someone who can."

"But, my dear," objected her husband, "it seems to me you are condemning dispensations——"

"I can't help it, Edward! Don't talk to me of dispensations. I say it is a crying shame. What use is all this heaped-up money to Elias? He is a fool. And he is not even—like most men—a marriageable fool."

"He is a merchant-prince," said Mynheer Overdyk solemnly. "Nothing can alter that." He spoke the words as one might speak in church. To him intellect was a secondary thing altogether, and account-books were the only books of account. What mattered it if a man could not read, as long as others could find his name inscribed on the great roll of the National Debt? And Elias's signature, however loosely it might sprawl across the paper, was still the sign manual of the richest "koopman" in Koopstad.

"It is just that which aggravates me," cried Aunt

Theresa. "Here he is everything who ought to be nothing and nothing who ought to be everything. He should have been neither or both; you understand what I mean. And it always strikes me as being so particularly hard upon the other two boys, who now just miss the goal. 'Half achieved is lost,' as the proverb says. And they have to sit down all their lives long and look at the apples beyond their reach, like Tante—Tante—what was the name?—Tante Lize. Yes, it is decidedly exasperating, and I repeat, it ought not to be allowed."

Mynheer Overdyk's commercial integrity objected to this view. "Oh come, Theresa," he said stolidly, "that is nonsense, you know. The money is Volderdoes money, and the business is a Volderdoes business, and Elias is the last of the Volderdoes blood. Henk and Huib have no right to a penny, if you come to think of that. Nor would they have been nearly as well off as they are now, supposing your sister Judith had been Hendrik Lossell's first matrimonial venture. In my opinion they have been singularly lucky, although I don't deny that their present position may remind one somewhat of Tantalus. But they can well have the decency, at any rate, to wait for the poor fellow's money, which will all come one day to them and their children, just as if they were old Elias's offspring instead of the poor blind fool. I often laugh to think what a rage old Elias would have been in, could he have foreseen how matters would turn out. But let Judith's children be content with their good fortune—aren't they in the business already?—and remember they have no right to a cent."

Yes, the money was rightfully Elias's. That admission was very strongly accentuated in Koopstad commercial circles. For in these the heredity of a great business-house with its goodwill and its connections and its hundred and one sources of money-breeding was as firmly established a principle as the reversion to a title or an entail. These things went with the blood for ever and ever, like the King's

crown by the grace of God. People might talk about Hendrik and Hubert, and acting partners, and the representatives of the business here, there and everywhere, and all the rest of it; in practical life, of course, everything depended upon who had the right to sign for the firm, but, theoretically, none of the older merchants ever forgot that Elias alone was the grandson of grumpy, snuffy, wealthy old Elias Volderdoes.

"All the same, I repeat it is cruelly hard upon everybody," persisted Aunt Theresa, who did not appreciate her husband's view, she not having come into the family on the Volderdoes side; "and I maintain that it oughtn't to be allowed."

No, it oughtn't to be allowed. All her nieces agreed with Aunt Theresa. And not her nieces only, but a good many other young ladies, especially those who had not yet completed their education. But though they arrived at the same conclusion, they reached it by a very different road. Public feeling ran high against Hendrik Lossell among the older pupils of the select academies for young ladies, and even in the labour-loaded class-rooms of that public abomination, the Girls' High School. It was absolutely impossible, and the young ladies refused to believe it, that a man could be an idiot with such eyes as they had seen beam forth upon the disconcerted congregation of "St. Jack's." Evidently his brothers were keeping him sequestered for the sake of his property. It was the old story of the Man with the Iron Mask, whom only unromantic people believed not to have been a twin-brother of Louis XIV. Elias was a living nineteenth century romance. Anna told Agatha, and Agatha told Anna. They excited each other about it until all the facts of the horrible mystery were worked out in black and white. In one school Bella van Wreede, the State Prosecutor's daughter, was put into Coventry because she had refused to appeal to her father to rescue Elias. She did not dare to, pleaded Bella. She was put into Coventry,

forthwith, for last week's "subject" had told her, and ought to have taught her, that "Cowardice is an Accomplice of Crime."

It must not be hastily concluded that the enthusiasm for Elias was confined to those young ladies whose hair still lay in two thick cords on their unwilling backs. They who would judge thus would but lightly estimate the charms of the handsome hero. Nay, indeed, fair maidens with their hair "done up"—which head-dress is equivalent to a hunting-cap where men are concerned, and means that the chase has begun in earnest—fair maidens who were "out" and wore low dresses, and even one (as I happen to know) who had refused an eligible offer because she wouldn't live with her mother-in-law—not only giddy girls, therefore, but discreet young women of the world, all these were touched with just a twinge of the contagion. They called it the "Elias-fever" in Koopstad. It was very disagreeable for Hendrik Lossell. "Have you got the Elias-fever already?" said one chit to another in a crowded tram, unconscious that the little gentleman in the corner was the tyrant whom she execrated. "I've had it, but I'm better," replied chit No. 2. "My father says he isn't really ill-treated, but has a beautiful carriage to drive in, and my father says that his brothers are good to him, and don't try to kill him, as Jennie declared the other day."

"I don't believe it——" began her companion indignantly. Hendrik went and stood outside.

None of them believed it. For to deny that Elias was persecuted would have been like throwing water on the candle by which young Fervour delights to read the world. If there were no wrongs, there would be no romance. And Elias's wrongs were fortunately intensely romantic.

It was not an opportunity which fact-frozen young Koopstad could afford to waste.

Effusions and floral tributes began occasionally to arrive at the quiet villa, but of these Johanna made short work.

She threw away the flowers and tore up the notes. She was shocked at the contents of some of those queer letters. One young lady actually offered to rescue Elias with the aid of her brother and a good conscience. She said that her brother was four feet, and the wall only five feet and a half.

But the poetesses were the most enviable of all. There are a good many of them in Holland, rhymes being too easy in Dutch, and prosody too difficult, for either to supply the desirable barrier. Elias's blindness and deafness, his beauty, his unavailable wealth, all these provided countless spurs for the too-eager Pegasus. The singers would apostrophise their idol as a god or as an idiot, according as they selected him for an object of their praise or their pity. Ida Dorestan, the Dutch Felicia Hemans—who, you will remember, was a girl at that time, of seventeen or eighteen summers—Ida Dorestan composed a sonnet "To an Eagle Maimed."

" . . . . .  
 The prisoned eagle will not pair, and you,  
 Bound to your loneliness by triple chain  
 Of Darkness, Silence, Cruelty, in vain  
 You learn that happiness is born of two."

I forget whether that was the beginning or the end. The matter is of no great importance. "The prisoned eagle will not pair"; that was the beginning, end, and middle of the business. "There ought to be no *insulated* fortunes," insisted Tante Theresa, proud of the word, although it is just possible the happy shot was originally aimed at "isolated," "and if there must be, a law should be enacted to restore communication. I am sure, Edward, that I am expressing myself clearly. Money does not, I consider, belong to an individual, not even, as you *will* torment me with old Volderdoes, to a family. It belongs to us all, the better classes, as a community, and we are collectively and—what is the word?—solidarily responsible for its use and depend-



ent upon its benefits. We stand and fall together, we, the people with white hands."

"And our palms, are they pure too?" queried young Isidor, who was the "enfant terrible" of the Overdyk and van Bussen families. It was his mother's fault. She had read poetry and called him Isidor.

But nobody attended to him. "Only, my dear Theresa," interposed Mevrouw Amelia van Bussen, who was present. "it appears to me that is a very uncomfortable theory. It seems to make one so promiscuously accountable for other people's shortcomings. Don't you think we must all stand or fall by our own merits? You can't cover an inferior article with the prestige of your name!"

"She is thinking of her cocoa," whispered Isidor in a disgusted aside to his cousin Adelheid. Adelheid frowned. She liked Isidor, but she did not approve of levity in connection with articles of commerce. She was forty; she had been born in Koopstad seventeen years ago.

"You misapprehend me, my dear," replied Aunt Theresa mildly. She was always mild. Everything in the dear old lady remained unruffled, except her throat and wrists. "I do not mean that we are morally accountable, but socially we can hardly help ourselves, I fear. The sins of the individual are set down to the class, and when one of us goes astray"—a keen glance at Isidor—"the crowd cries: 'Look at the Patricians!'"

"And how many of us are what we call ourselves?" asked Isidor impatiently. "Genuine hereditary Patricians?"

"You are, Isidor, for one, and therefore it is rude of you to allude to the subject. Trust you Radicals to stickle for rank. And I am, also. But you need not insult the van Bussens, who are a highly respectable family too."

And then there arose a general combustion in which Elias Lossell dropped altogether out of sight.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### HENDRIK LOSSELL'S FIRST STEP.

HENDRIK LOSSELL found his half-brother in the greenhouse which formed the blind man's daily delight. It was a bright, sunshiny morning in early spring. A holy calm lay over the lonely little villa, with its trim garden—still half asleep—and newly constructed stables. Everything was neat and taut, well-built, well-painted, well-kept. For to that Johanna saw—from seven in the morning till eleven at night. And Hubert would write and ask—from far away—if the horses were healthy, and what flowers there were in the conservatory, and if Elias thought the dovecot could last another year. These Chinese letters constituted a periodically returning Great Event in Elias's life. They were addressed to him, to him personally.

*Den Wel Edel Geboren Heer,  
Den Heer Elias Lossell,  
Villa ———.*

Hush, I am growing too explicit. We shall have you writing to that now desolate house near Koopstad—flourishing, flustering, blustering Koopstad, which has not forgotten Elias Lossell yet.

Johanna would read him the letter, passing off the words on his hands or neck. And Elias, having drunk in its contents, would keep it by him through the day, and ask to have it re-read from time to time. As long as he held it in

his hand, he would remember its separate individuality, but, once it was laid with the others, it dropped into a common chaos of indistinctness. He forgot the news it had conveyed, and such news, therefore, would bear repetition. One of the knottiest and most vexatious questions of Johanna's otherwise simple moral life was this, whether, when the post was delayed, she might read to Elias an old letter, as if it were new? She could easily do so, and it furnished him with much innocent enjoyment. She longed to have sufficient immoral courage to perpetrate the deception.

Hubert wrote once a month, as a rule. And presently came kind messages from the English girl he was going to make his wife out there, and then "love from Margaret" in every letter, or "Maggie sends her kindest love."

On the day when the first message from "Margaret" reached him, Elias sat silent and thoughtful for many hours. "Margaretha," as Johanna read it. It had been his mother's name. He could not remember his mother, but he remembered, or rather he knew, about her. Johanna had kept the recollection before him as an ever-present fact. The defunct Judith had been Elias's conception of "Mamma." To distinguish between this imitation article and the genuine jewel, Johanna (who felt no love towards the step-parent) had devised for the dead woman the name of "Mother Margaretha." She taught her charge to reverence the words, and Elias, who was still conscious of the faded brightness of his early youth, was quite willing to connect it with the name of his departed mother. "Love from Margaretha." "Mother Margaretha." The similar sounds jingled through his brain all day. He found it difficult to keep them apart. Who was this Margaretha whom his brother had married, and who was sending him her love? He knew who "Margaretha" was. He had always known. Why had Hubert married Margaretha?

Johanna watched his troubled face and wondered what dilemma was tormenting him. "Oh, nothing," he answered,

when she asked. The perplexity, however, still lingered over his brow. He felt as if he could not bring this puzzle to Johanna for solution. He was afraid of her reply.

"How de do, Elias?" said Hendrik mechanically, feeling for his step-brother's hand with the tips of his fingers. He looked up into the blind man's face, impatient of the perpetual barrier between them. He was always oppressed in Elias's presence by a sense of his own physical littleness and overwhelming intellectual superiority. "How is he, Johanna?" he asked. "Well and happy? Poor chap!" And he turned restlessly on his heel, and recalled how tiresome Cornelia had been that morning.

"Mynheer is quite well, thank you, Meneer Hendrik," replied Johanna, without effusion. She might sometimes address her charge as "Elias" or even "Jasje"; she invariably spoke of him to everyone—master or servant—as Myn Heer, dividing the two syllables—with lingering affection. All other gentlemen were simply "Meneer," and the two step-brothers, somehow, were not "Meneer Lossell." They were "Meneer Hendrik," and "Meneer Hubert," as in the days of their youth—a point, one of many, on which they did not agree with Johanna.

The distinction, here indicated, might be compared to the difference in English between "My Lord" and "Me Lud," only that Meneer is almost universal in Dutch as pronunciation of the word Mynheer. Compare, in French, M'sieu and Monsiegnur.

"Myn Heer is well," said Johanna, and she stooped over Elias, who stood half-averted, busy with his flowers, and told him that his brother was come to see him.

"I know," answered Elias a little testily, turning his sightless eyes towards the place where Hendrik stood. And, indeed, it was true that he knew, for he had retained, and even developed, the faculty of perceiving the presence of living things in his immediate vicinity. It was a nervous

perception, probably, although he said that he felt "the tremble in the air." And with the few who formed his own little circle a touch, especially of the hand—was it the shape he recognized?—would enable him to distinguish one from the other.

"I know," he repeated. And then he began speaking to Hendrik about a subject which just now was engrossing all his attention. Johanna had told him that morning that his two canaries were making preparations for breeding. That meant that there would be little canaries some day—his own, not bought from somebody else, but his own, a very different matter. And one of these he would present to Cornelia. Did Hendrik think Cornelia would like to have a canary? He "paused for a reply."

He did not often do so, the nature of his affliction unavoidably pushing him in the direction of monologue. No one could converse with him as easily as Johanna. His brothers had learned slowly to spell out occasional sentences, but the deaf man would grow impatient of their evident painstaking, and complain that they tired him, or tickled him, or that they always said the same things.

He talked on without asking himself whether he wearied *them*. That, partly, was Johanna's fault, because he never wearied Johanna. He delighted in talking, when the mood came upon him, but often he would sit silent for long, slow hours, too tired to talk. For his brain was fitful, and his powers seemed to alternate between activity and repose even in those moments when he was physically awake. Suddenly—unreasonably you might think, for there was not always an impulse from the outside—he would rouse himself and begin to speak. And those who listened—as Hendrik was doing now—might well grow weary after a while—for he spoke slowly, laboriously, seeking for words which seemed to have slipped from their accustomed corners, and occasionally stopping altogether, when some particular expression was lost for good and all.

In such cases Johanna would quickly come to his assistance, but the brothers would hesitate—uncomfortably—between probably avoidable annoyance and possibly unnecessary relief.

“I shall like to have canaries of my own,” said Elias, “and I wonder whether I shall be able to distinguish their singing from that of the old ones. I can always *hear*, you know, Hendrik, when the birds in my room begin to sing, and I like the canaries’ singing much better than the cockatoo’s.”

“It is a delusion of Myn Heer’s,” interrupted Johanna—if it can be called interruption—“that Myn Heer can always distinguish. You must leave it to him, if you please, Meneer Hendrik. But he certainly knows if the room is silent or not.”

“And then there is the other bird,” Elias continued, “the bird that John brought home for me the other day. The—the—what is its name? Tell Hendrik, Johanna, and me too. Tell me, quick!”

Johanna told him. “Nightingale.” “‘The other day’ is six weeks ago,” she explained to Hendrik. “You remember his nightingale. It died the day before yesterday. I have not dared to tell him. He understands nothing, poor dear, of death.”

“What would you have?” said Hendrik bitterly. “He is an idiot.” The air of the greenhouse seemed stifling to him. He cast impatient glances around. In his irritable mood he wished he had not come.

Johanna bit her tongue, as a punishment for having run away with her. For the first rule of her programme, so to speak, was invariably to represent Elias to his step-brothers as far more intelligent and clear-headed than in the bottom of her heart she could acknowledge him to be. He never did anything “un-stupid,” without her telling them how clever he was.

“I mean,” she began hastily, “that he can’t understand



how people he goes on loving should have ceased to exist. It is a puzzle, Meneer Hendrik, and has tired out stronger brains than Myn Heer's, as I was reading to-day before eight days (i. e. last Sunday) in the pious dissertations of the blessed Ureliag. Only yesterday Myn Heer asked after his father. It is remarkable what differences he makes. He never asks after Mevrouw your departed mother, that is so recently dead."

This was Johanna's revenge, sharp and swift.

"You have not seen my azaleas, Hendrik," continued Elias, with a slight stumble over the word, which, by the bye, he pronounced "azaléas." He mispronounced a number of words—especially as regards accent—from never having heard them spoken, and for want of a better teacher than Johanna. He led the way towards the corner where the flowers were grouped. "They are fine, are they not? This pink one with the red stripes is an especial beauty, I think"—he touched it as he spoke. "There is not another so full at this moment. But when the white ones come out at the back, we shall have a yet grander display."

Laboriously he stumbled over the sentences, pointing as he did so. He was repeating a conversation he had had several times with Johanna that very morning, and often on preceding days. Those who heard him talk thus correctly, could form but the faintest idea what patient labor it required to teach him the little he knew.

He passed slowly down the conservatory, guiding himself with one hand between the high stands which left but a narrow gangway for his broad figure, and drawing Hendrik's attention, as he went, to this flower and that. "Isn't that lovely?" he repeated, "and that one, up there, the pale mauve creeper—the new creeper is up there, isn't it, Johanna?" Sometimes he would lose his bearings, and make mistakes, much to Johanna's secret vexation, though she took care not to correct him in Hendrik's presence. Hendrik did not always notice the mistakes, his attention would



wander away from his step-brother's slow drawl to his own troubles at home. And in this manner, following each other step by step, and pausing every now and then, as Elias waited to pick a flower for the nosegay he was putting together for Cornelia, they made the tour of the greenhouse and came back towards the little square entry, in which a seat had been arranged between the double glass doors. "I must get some of the early pinks for my bouquet," said Elias. "They are in a separate frame just opposite the seat. And, oh, Hendrik, you must look at these tiny things"—he turned hastily, to the right instead of to the left, and stopped before the spreading leaves of a stately palm. "They are queer little creatures, are they not? Tor—Tor—something the gardener calls them—just like little old ladies, I tell people, with those two stiff curls on each side of the face." He stretched out his hand and struck it against one of the palm-leaves. An expression of petulant dismay broke over his face. "Johanna!" he cried, "Johanna!" The old woman led him gently to where the *Torrenias* stood in pots on the other side.

Hendrik burst into a guffaw as the blind man's hand came into contact with the tree. It was not an outbreak of ill-nature, but of embarrassment and irritation, a sudden flare-up of scorn, not of Elias, but of everybody and everything. He was in one of those moods when a man laughs and a woman cries. And his laugh was not pleasant to hear.

Johanna, however, resented it as an insult—a blow—to the defenceless man by their side. She hurried Elias away, throwing her arm around him—or as much as she could reach of him—in a vain attempt to shield her charge against outrage, and, while she spread out her hand, as if to ward off an enemy, she cast one furious glance at Hendrik Lossell. But Elias refused to be protected he knew not why. "Don't, Johanna," he said, "I want to show Hendrik the little old ladies. I wasn't attending to what I was saying when I lingered by the palms."

"Let me take his hand," muttered Hendrik, ashamed—before the servant—of his laugh. The two brothers sat down on the garden-seat in the entry. It was much cooler there than in the conservatory, and Hendrik, from where he sat, could get a full view of the house and grounds under the light of the bright spring day. Johanna left them for a short time, called away by a servant, and Elias went on talking, of his flowers, and his birds and the horses, which he did not care to use, but liked to pat, and all his little, little peaceful world. Hendrik barely listened. His restless eyes wandered away from his brother's tranquil face over all the quiet comfort of his surroundings. He felt—with a lull of satisfaction—that no one could deny that he and Hubert did their duty to the wretched idiot whom fate had cast as an obstacle across their path. In this, surely, they could challenge public opinion. Elias lived in comparative luxury. He had his small, but admirably adapted, villa, his carriage, his servants, his gardens, and hot-houses. Everything his simple, and naturally restricted, tastes desired was obtained for him. His household, despite Johanna's admirable management, cost a considerable annual sum—the gardens were a heavy item—and this expenditure only seemed insignificant because the man's wealth was so disproportionate to his requirements. A smile played about Hendrik's thin lips—or was it a scowl?—as he thought of the young ladies of Koopstad and their inconsequent hero-worship, and recalled the school-girl conversation he had overheard in the tram-car. His look rested on the miserable wreck beside him, now sunk into silence, and immovable in its inaccessibility as a block of wood or stone. No, decidedly, Hubert and he did their duty, more than their duty, by their idiot brother.

Elias was tired. The intensity of brain-life, so to say, which his brother's visit had called forth, had spent itself, and a numbness had succeeded. That was always more or less the case when anything stimulated him, for his con-

sciousness existed—if I may avail myself of the expression—in flickers. It could not burn serenely for any length of time.

He laid his hand on his step-brother's knees, and so they sat on through the still Sabbath morning, the one, enfolded in a cloud of mist, the other awake, alert, impatient, every nerve a-tingle with some cause of complaint against God.

They had been sitting thus for some time, when Hendrik abruptly seized Elias's hand.

"Are you happy, Elias?" he spelled awkwardly, but with ultimate success.

"Very happy," answered Elias. "Why not? I have everything I want. And people are very good to me. Yes, I am happy, though often I should like to be able to see—and hear. But not as badly as I used to long ago. I should like to meet Hubert again, and papa, and Mother Margaretha. Don't you think it a great pity, Hendrik, that they all went away so far?"

A quarter of an hour later Hendrik was walking back briskly in the direction of home. But his briskness was not the activity of health as much as of disease. He was swayed to and fro, and borne irresistibly onward by an ever-increasing tempest of discontent. His visit to Elias had not had the effect he expected from it. It had not warmed his heart by an increase of affection; it had not even—and who knows but that he had unconsciously half-hoped for such a result?—cheered his discomfort by the spectacle of an affliction far greater than his own.

On the contrary, he envied Elias.

He envied him his reposeful, sheltered, irresponsible ease. He—in the midst of the turmoil and the anxiety, the heat and cold of daily existence—he turned wistful eyes towards the quiet sunlit bay, where Elias's ship lay anchored for ever—outside, and beyond, the stream.

And he envied the miserable fool, his brother.

He looked down at the posy he was carrying in his hand. A bunch of flowers, red and white—"Only those two colours," Elias had said, "I like the colours in my bouquets to go well together." It must be remembered that he had not been blind from his birth.

A present from Elias to Cornelia.

Suddenly—in an unreasoned movement of "*dépit*"—he twirled the flowers from him into a ditch by the roadside.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### AIGRE-DOUX.

"I AM come to remind you of your pledge, Cornelia," said Alers. "You know that you promised to help me when you could, in return for my procuring you the husband of your choice."

"I wish you wouldn't come here, Thomas," replied Cornelia. "You know that Hendrik doesn't care to meet you, and you might have the good sense to stop away when you're not wanted."

"But if it's not you who want me, it is I who want you," pleaded Thomas. "How do you think I can live without my dear little sister? My sweet little Roman-nosed sister, that was a mother to me in the days of my youth?"

"Do you begin with fooling?" said Cornelia angrily. "I am not so much older than you, Tom. And if I am, I must be proportionately wiser——"

"It doesn't follow," interrupted Thomas.

"And therefore I advise you to go," she continued coolly. "Hendrik has grown obligingly distinct in his utterances, the honeymoon being over, and he had the kindness to inform me the other day that you were a cad, and that, if he found you in the house, he would kick you downstairs."

"He!" said Alers scornfully. The young lawyer was tall and slight, but wiry and active, an altogether different man from skinny Henky Lossell.

"I cannot imagine why he has taken so violent a dislike

to you," continued Cornelia, looking out of the window, and toying with the tassel of an easy-chair. "But as it is the case, you had better wait till the storm blows over. I dare say he will want you for something or other in time."

"That's just it," replied her brother. "I want him—don't you see?—as I said a minute ago. Come, Corry, you never were shabby. I saw him go down towards the Old Town Gate. I don't doubt he is off to spend the morning with his poor dear brother. You may as well listen to me before he comes back." He threw himself negligently on a lounge without awaiting further permission. "It is too bad," he went on, "that a man should be hunted out of his brother-in-law's house in this manner. And for nothing else too but for benefiting other people without any advantage to himself."

"And do you often do that?" queried Cornelia mockingly.

"Cornelia, you are ungrateful. One can indeed see that the honeymoon is past."

"Well, never mind. Tell me what you want, and be quick about it."

"Want!" repeated Thomas reflectively. "How often we have used that word since I came into the room." His sister made an impatient movement, but to this he paid no attention. "Yes," he continued; "we all want each other, constantly, and continuously. And my need of your help for one thing, and your need of mine for another, is at the bottom, I suppose, of all the loves and affections and friendships, or whatever their various names may be."

"You are as prosy," said Cornelia with an—artificial—yawn, "as if you were going to ask me for money, which, unfortunately for us both, I haven't got."

"Corry, you are a genius. With your quick wit you at once perceive that the universal 'want' of one another can always be reduced to money's worth. It is the common denominator; is that not what we used to call the thing at



school? You and I are friends, for instance, friendship represented by unknown quantity  $X$ , reducible to definite sum, certainly existing, though probably undiscoverable. Commercial relations, say, on my side. Value nineteen and twopence. Social connections on yours. Value thirteen and four. My love accordingly greater than yours to the tune of five and ten. It's very seldom we can state the figures, but our perceptions are to blame for that, not nature's clear arithmetic."

"How palpably false!" replied Cornelia listlessly. "But if you consider it correct, as I certainly am the fonder of the two, you had better, instead of asking for money, pay me the difference in cash."

"I have not asked for money yet, dearest; excuse my pointing that out to you. And, in fact, the object of my coming is not to empty Lossell's pockets, but to fill them."

"Really?" said Cornelia. "The result, I fancy, is the same."

"What do you mean, you spiteful creature?"

"I am only a poor ignorant woman, Tom, but I have seen enough of the world to know that nothing comes more expensive in it than having one's pockets filled by another man."

"Don't be epigrammatic, Corry. It's ugly in a woman under fifty. And you're not fifty yet, whatever you may look."

"Ah, that's right," retorted Cornelia, flushing. "I like you best like that, Tom. I'm always afraid of you when you go in for courtesy and 'my dear'-ing, but when you get frankly rude again, then we understand each other."

"My dear girl, I don't want to be disagreeable, I can assure you. I merely thought I was complimenting you on your good looks. You wear well, Cornelia. Everybody said so in church, when you were married, and I suppose it

is pleasant to know that people notice it. Let us talk of something else."

"Yes, let us talk of something else," said Cornelia, ignoring her brother's final thrust. "Look here, Thomas, if I read the meaning of all this superfluous chatter aright, it indicates that you have nothing particular to say to me, but that you want me to allow you to wait here quietly till Hendrik, who denies his door to you, comes home and finds you in the house. Is that not it?"

"To beard the lion in his den, in fact," answered Alers, with a sneer. "My dear Cornelia, you are gifted with second sight. I wish you were a man, and had married Hendrika Lossell."

"Et après?" said Cornelia, who, as she had herself remarked, preferred her brother in his native rudeness.

"I want that of you, and a little besides. I merely want you afterwards to back me up with Hendrik. It's all for your own good and his. You can't do much good, but that's no reason for not doing the little you can."

"Tell me about it," said Cornelia, without much interest.

"I had better see first how far I can get with Hendrik. Don't you think, Corry, that Ninnie is behaving very foolishly—no, worse still, very stupidly—with young Paffer?"

"I don't care a brass cent about young Paffer," answered Cornelia frankly. "But, as you intend to honour me with your company for some length of time, you might as well take the opportunity of telling me what means you employed to arrange my marriage with Lossell, and in how far that arrangement is connected with the abuse he now plentifully sprinkles on your probably far from innocent head."

"You are as humble as you are sagacious, my dear. If Lossell is angry with me, it can hardly be for making him the happy husband of a perfect wife."

"Stop fooling, Thomas," she said, with an angry flash in her eyes. "Too much sour is as sickening as too much sweet. You can go, or stay, as you like. But, if you stay, talk sense. Hendrik told me to ask you about it. And I do so."

"Hendrik told you to ask me about it!" repeated Alers, sitting up on his lounge in genuine surprise. "Good gracious! Cornelia, have you two come to that already?"

"What?" she asked, disturbed, in her turn, by the tone of his voice. "Explanations? Naturally. Are we the kind of people to join hands and walk blindfold? He tells me that it doesn't pay to pretend to be rich when you're poor. Neither after marriage, he says, nor before. And I want to know what he means by 'before.'"

"He means," replied Thomas carelessly, "that you had debts when you married him. They were small ones—gloves, ribbons, and fal-de-lals—but he appears to have ferreted them out."

"That is a lie, Thomas."

"Or he means, perhaps, that all Koopstad, and we also, believe him to be richer than he really is. That is very probable, and I can understand its annoying him."

"And that, dear Thomas, is another lie."

"My fair Cornelia, you are unpleasant. Let us return to Paffer. His father, I hear, had a cigar-shop. Wholesale and retail, I fancy, for Paffer says it was the one, and his friends say it was the other. The profits, however, were undeniably wholesale, so I suppose there can be no serious objection to the shop. Besides, the shop is gone, and the profits remain. An officer the son of a tradesman doesn't matter so much, if the tradesman was prosperous and is obligingly dead. I don't think we should feel annoyed about the Darwin theory of the descent of man, if our ancestors had had the decency to become extinct. But now they get themselves obtrusively preserved in all our Zoölogical Gar-

dens, just like Judge Starter's mother, in her mob-cap, by the family fireside."

"I want to know," said Cornelia, "what he means by 'before.'"

"I sha'n't tell you," replied Thomas brusquely.

"Yes, you will," reiterated Cornelia placidly. "You see there is something to tell."

"There may be, but I shall not tell it."

"Yes, you will."

And so he did. "Here goes," he said. "After all, perhaps you had better be told. It appears that you people have been skirmishing, and in that case it is always best to know, if you want to retreat, what ground you retreat on."

When he had finished his recital, Cornelia sat for some time silent, still playing with that tassel of her easy-chair. Her eyes were fixed on some vague spot, away out in the bleak garden. Thomas, in spite of his effrontery, could not help feeling uncomfortable. He was at a loss what to say next, and vexed to know himself at a loss.

"It was a low thing to do, Thomas," said Cornelia at last, her deep tones seeming to accentuate the previous silence. "It was not a deed, I believe, that Hendrik could have been guilty of."

"He had no cause," said Alers bitterly. "L'occasion fait le larron—Occasion makes the thief."

"It was a thief invented that falsehood," retorted Cornelia scornfully.

"So be it," acquiesced her brother. "Honest men have lived up to it since. But do not, I beg of you, cut up nasty about this business. Surely, you can see, Cornelia, that, if I did wrong, I did it on your behalf."

"I deny that," replied Cornelia. "You made a fool of me 'under four eyes.' You very nearly missed doing so in the sight of all the city, and that catastrophe was avoided not by you but by my husband, who is a better man than you."

"Tut, tut," began Thomas, reddening.

"Yes, I say that he is a better man than you. At least he behaved honourably in the dilemma, into which your deception had brought him, if he had not behaved honourably before. No woman likes to hear that she has been chosen for her money. Least of all, when the money is not even there for her to fall back upon. But, at any rate, it is a satisfaction to know that the man who proposed to my fortune, retained my hand, when he learned it was empty."

"Oh, as for that," interposed Thomas, "it is possible——"

She rose from her listless attitude in an outburst of not undignified wrath: "I ignore your possibilities," she cried, towering over her brother. "If his honour did not turn to me in the first place, it deferred to public opinion, or it was true to himself. What care I? There was a something in him, a something, no matter what, that kept him from throwing me over. I asked myself whether you would have had it. At least, I can respect him for that."

Thomas was silent.

"Go," she said. "You had better go now, Thomas. There can be no good in your seeing Hendrik to-day. Nor in your staying with me at this moment. I must first assimilate this agreeable little story you have just told me, and learn to be thankful to you for having sold your sister for a spurious bank-note."

"My dear Cornelia," cried the lawyer in alarm, "for Heaven's sake, don't mount the romantic horse. What's done can't be mended. You are happy with Lossell, who knew all the facts of the case, as you rightly point out, before you were married. I took care that he should. You have gained by the transaction. He has gained by the transaction. The only one who has lost is poor discarded I."

"Leave me in peace," she said, still standing erect.

"We can't quarrel," he pleaded. "We can't. It would be too absurd. We can't afford family *brouilles*, they come awfully expensive. I tell you, I will explain everything to Hendrik."

"What will you explain to Hendrik?" said Lossell's voice in the open door.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### WHY NOT ?

"THERE could be no better opportunity for explaining," said Alers, standing between the wife by the window and the husband at the door. "It is all a most vexatious misunderstanding and merely requires a little good nature in clearing it up."

"You are a cad, Alers," retorted Hendrik, moving forward into the room. "And now, matters being settled so far, there is nothing left for you, I should say, but to make yourself scarce."

"My dear Lossell, you are objectionable. And needlessly so."

"I don't know about that. I said you were a cad."

"Other people have told me that before. Remember I am a lawyer. But they never meant it. Nor do you, or you would not have waited till after your marriage to mention the fact."

"Out of deference to Cornelia," said Hendrik, "I kept my opinion to myself"

"Exactly," replied Thomas. "And now, out of deference to Cornelia, I will have none of your opinion, but return it to you, requesting you to keep it still."

"Strike him, Hendrik," said Cornelia, in a low voice. "Ring for Mulder to turn him out."

"C—— you both," cried Thomas, "with your confounded insolence. Yes, ring, do. Let's have a scene! Let's make fools of ourselves! Look here, if there's to be

a row, wait for a reason for rowing. We shall have cause enough at this rate, before our hairs are gray. What do I want of you, do you think, that I come here, exposing myself to insult? I brought you together for your pleasure, not mine, and if it's turned out a big mistake—as seems only too plain—you should vent your spite on each other, not me. Why didn't you think of all that before marrying? And what do you reproach me with? You with her poverty. She with yours. As if all that wasn't written down plain—without my interfering—in those precious marriage-settlements which are the true marriage-tie. And if you're too poor, why, that's the very thing I came about. I admit that you're too poor. So am I. So are all of us. So is everybody—worse luck—except the half-dozen men who are too rich." He stopped, fairly out of breath, between anger and eloquence. "Good-day to you," he said, turning on his heel, as Cornelia rang the bell. "After all, it was purely a matter of business I came about, Lossell. And I thought—and still think—it might have been made very *advantageous* to us both."

He walked out into the hall with stately step, and slowly quitted the house.

Hendrik and Cornelia stood staring at each other in the middle of the room. "Oh, hang it!" began Hendrik at length, "you needn't have been so rough with him, Cornelia. There was no reason for you to ring the bell."

"I unfortunately still sometimes resent insult," replied Cornelia bitterly, "even from my nearest and dearest, like Thomas and—yourself. Never mind, I dare say the habit will wear off in a month or two."

"But if he merely came, as he said, to offer apologies and amends—"

"Call him back," said Cornelia, "and tell him you will take them in cash." She waved her hand in the direction of the servant who appeared at the door.

"At least we might accord him a hearing," replied Hendrik. He took a couple of steps towards the man. "Mulder," he said, raising his voice, "run after Mynheer Alers. Tell him I shall be glad to see him at the office to-morrow morning, any time between nine and eleven."

Two minutes later Thomas was again in the breakfast-room. He stood aside in the doorway to allow his sister to pass out.

"I came back with Mulder, my dear Lossell," he explained apologetically. "My little business, if it is to come to anything, will not allow of loss of time."

"I never attend to business on Sundays," said Hendrik, glad of something to bridge over a little preliminary awkwardness. "It doesn't seem right."

"I can heartily agree with you," rejoined Thomas, "as a rule. But when anything gets into a hole, you remember, you are always allowed to pull it out."

"Are you in a hole?" questioned Hendrik hastily. "Because, if so—"

"No, no. Here, let's sit down, and talk it over quietly. You are strangely irritable, Hendrik, far more than you used to be. Not that I mind your angry words, for I know you did not mean them. But you should take citrate of magnesia, or something of that sort. Something to cool your blood and freshen you up. On my honour, I only came here to put you in the way of a good thing. And just look at the manner in which you fly out at me. I think you owe me an apology, Hendrik."

"By no means," said Hendrik. "Besides, it was Cornelia rang the bell. If I called you bad names, you know why. You have treated me shamefully. But if you want to atone for it, as far as you can, I won't hinder you. What is it? Another contract for tea?"

"Not exactly," replied Alers. "You must admit, however, Lossell, that that contract I got for you with the

Royal Dutch Steamship Company was a very advantageous thing in its way."

"I didn't deny it," said Hendrik.

Alers smiled. "Had it not been," he said, "you would hardly have recalled me just now."

Lossell cast a glance at the clock. "Unless you wish to meet Cornelia at lunch," he said, "you had better make haste, and have done. What is it?"

"It's a syndicate," replied Alers bluntly. "A gold-mine in the Transvaal. Not one of your bogus companies, but a genuine gold-mine. I have the prospectuses with me. Terms of subscription, and surveyor's report. Report capital. Gold a certainty. Probable dividends fifteen to twenty-five per cent." He spread out the papers on the table.

Hendrik pushed them aside. "I never take shares in this kind of thing," he said. "I never take any shares at all. I have no money to spare, as you might know."

"It's not a matter of taking shares," replied Thomas. "Do you think I should come here bothering you about an ordinary subscription? It's a syndicate, I tell you, to guarantee the whole undertaking. The amount wanted is only fifty thousand pounds English, six hundred thousand florins, in one hundred pound shares. The price of emission is one hundred per cent., and the syndicate takes the shares and guarantees them at eighty. Do you understand?"

"Thank you," answered Hendrik. "I believe I know what is understood under a syndicate, and I have also heard before of the very simple financial transaction you have just had the goodness to explain to me. But, not being a capitalist, I do not see where my interest in the matter is expected to come in."

"I want you, of course, to join the syndicate," said Thomas bluntly again. "It was complete—everything settled, the prospectus sent out—and now some idiot has suddenly drawn back. There is not the slightest risk, as

you see. You merely accept your share of the guarantee, and, as soon as the emission has taken place, you either retain a few shares if you wish to, or you dispose of the whole lot, at a hundred per cent. There is, as I repeat, not the slightest risk. Only a nominal guarantee of a few days, and then a certain profit of twenty per cent."

"Quite so," said Hendrik, "if the amount is subscribed."

"It will be subscribed ten times over. Aren't all the gold-mines at fancy prices just now? Look at the Leegput and the Stumper's Fall, and so many others. The roads of Transvaal are literally paved with gold."

"I am not a widow, Alers, nor a half-pay captain, nor anything else unfortunate, honourable and gullible, but a man of business, if you please."

"Well, well, I only mean, it's the time for gold-shares. You know that, yourself. Even the miserablest bubbles go up. On account of their lightness, I suppose. But this isn't a bubble. It's a bona-fide company. Of course I expect you to look thoroughly into it. It will bear looking into. There's a board of eighteen highly honourable men as directors, partly here, partly in London, and partly in Transvaal."

"How many in Transvaal?" asked Hendrik.

"Three here, three in London, and twelve in Transvaal."

"Nonsense, Alers. There are not twelve highly honourable men in all Transvaal."

"As for that, commercial integrity is local, like the bye-laws. The six European directors are honourable from a European point of view, the six South Africans from a South African. New communities require looser forms of development. Just look at the list, and complain, if you dare."

"I have no wish to," said Lossell. "The whole discussion is superfluous. Of course the sum required is a large one, and as I do not possess it, there the matter ends."

"Only seven thousand pounds are still untaken," replied

Alers, "and even these would have been gone, had this unexpected hitch not occurred. I really believe it is a perfectly safe way, Hendrik, of gaining a very considerable sum."

"Eighty-four thousand florins!" cried Hendrik. He got up as he spoke. "You see how useless all this talk has been. Wherever should I get eighty-four thousand florins?"

"You need get them nowhere. You merely guarantee the amount on Friday next, and the subscription being closed, and the shares allotted, the sum of sixteen thousand eight hundred florins will be paid out to you shortly after."

"Will you guarantee me my guarantee?" asked Hendrik.

"Nonsense. I have nothing to do with the matter. A poor devil like me. Except that I know it to be good."

"No interest at all?"

"Well, of course, if I can get you to fill up the gap, the other people will be properly grateful. It is very awkward for them, this sudden desertion. The man is dead, I believe, by-the-bye. I suppose he couldn't help that. I have merely a commission, if you like so to describe it. You see I am frank. But that is literally all."

"Of course I know that the profits gained by these syndicates are often a kind of bonus on capital," said Hendrik, "a sort of natural excrescence, with a minimum of danger. When they're really good, however, I fancy the bankers usually snap them up. I don't deny, mind you, that yours may be all you say. I wish I had the capital to risk it."

"Lossell," said Alers earnestly, "why do you beat about the bush in this manner? You know perfectly well that you can command the influence of ten times the amount. And it is just the influence which is wanted here, and not the capital itself. You bring in the dead weight of the money without requiring to touch it. You will never have such a



chance again, I should say, of earning something by Elias's wealth through merely letting it lie where it lies."

"I refuse," said Hendrik fiercely. And then, unconsciously, he broke into the same words his wife had used an hour earlier. "Go away!" he cried hastily. "Go away!"

"Don't be childish, Hendrik, I beg of you. Seventeen thousand florins is not a sum to be despised, especially when it can be used as a basis for further operations. And a guarantee of a thoroughly reliable——"

"I refuse," interrupted Hendrik.

"Undertaking like this is equivalent to saying: 'I'll hold your purse for you while you put your gloves on, if you'll give me a fifth of its contents, when you've done.'"

"I refuse," reiterated Hendrik, with averted eyes.

"You will repent it all your life. You have no money and you want to have some. Or you have some money and would like to have more. Here is an opportunity. I should not have offered it to you, but that I considered I owed you some amends for that unfortunate mistake of mine about the lottery-ticket. I am now doing whatever is in my power to conciliate you and to promote your——"

"I refuse. I refuse. I refuse!" cried Hendrik; and he ran from the room.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A PARTNERSHIP WITH LIMITED LIABILITY.

HE found Cornelia waiting for him by the luncheon-table. Her eyes were red, an unusual sight for him, and one always calculated to disturb a man's equanimity. And Cornelia's massive face was one on which sorrow sat far from prettily, yet impressively withal. You could see that she was not a woman to cry for a trifle, and the very presence, therefore, of any signs of tears was a proof of the reality of her affliction. Hendrik, irritated and excited beyond endurance already, felt that his only safeguard lay in silence. He threw himself on to his accustomed chair at the table, and his equally silent spouse took the seat opposite which was hers by right, and which had the advantage of somewhat shading her face against the light of the curtained windows.

The heavy stillness of the solemn meal—there is a stillness which is far from quiet—was broken by Alers, who thrust his head through the dining-room door. "My dear fellow," he said, "I can't wait for ever. At luncheon, by Jove! You might have taken leave of me before you began. Well, shall I tell them you seize Fortune by her all too scanty skirts?"

Cornelia glanced anxiously at her husband, without vouchsafing Thomas a look.

"I tell you for the last time that I refuse," spluttered Hendrik; "and I refuse to continue refusing. I can't turn my brother-in-law out of the house, Thomas, but I can lock

myself up in my own room till he takes himself off. And I shall do so, unless you leave us in peace."

"All right," retorted Thomas coolly, buttoning his coat. "Only your 'no' was so impetuous that I thought it might roll over into a 'yes.' They often do when they run too fast. I'm sorry for you. Ta-ta! What a disgrace I am in all of a sudden! But you'll work round, both of you—mark my words—when innocence asserts itself, as it is sure to do. Straightforward comes straight. That's always been my motto. Don't mind me. I'm going. You look very glum in here, the pair of you. By-the-bye, I told Corry about that mistake in connection with the lottery-ticket, Henk. She insisted on getting to the bottom of some hints of yours. But I didn't tell her of this magnificent new proposal. You see, I never speak of my best actions. Only of my second-best. I am sorry your marriage should form such a subject of regret for both of you. Well, you must settle that between yourselves. I really am off this time. Luncheon getting cold, eh? Atmosphere cold, generally. Ta-ta."

He nodded to both of them, and closed the door.

"Hendrik," said Cornelia, putting aside her silence, as it were with an effort, yet speaking in a steady tone of voice. "You heard what he said. It is true. He has told me. I can solemnly assure you that I never heard the story till this morning. In no way was I a party to the transaction. I must now accept the inevitable and swallow the humiliation as best I can. I don't want to know why you ultimately married me, Hendrik. I would rather seek repose in a variety of more or less agreeable possibilities. One thing, at any rate, I know. It was not for the worst of all reasons, money. And one other thing I know also. It was not for the best of all reasons—love."

"Cornelia——" he began nervously.

"Don't. Let us have no explanations. And no recrim-

inations. And, above, all no tendernesses. We shall drop into our places like other people, and be very comfortable, I doubt not, in time. I must be honest with you, Hendrik. I have no right to pose as a *délaissée*. I liked you, but, also, I wanted to get married. Well, I am married. We can't alter that. I, for one, should not wish to. We must both of us extract as much good as we can out of the arrangement. But please don't let us pretend. I have a horror of pretence."

"That I married you afterwards," stammered Hendrik, "is surely proof enough that I wanted you—rich or poor—for my wife."

"Please don't let us pretend," she repeated. "I respect you for having married me, and there we must let the matter rest. But, Hendrik, we must come to a clear understanding. We cannot go on quarrelling for ever about trifles. Only people who are excessively fond of each other can afford to quarrel constantly."

"My dear creature," interrupted Hendrik, "we do not quarrel constantly."

"Well, 'disagree,' if you prefer the word. We live in a state of chronic disagreement as regards matters pertaining to our daily existence. And every now and then there is an outbreak. There was one this morning. We pull different ways, Hendrik. Now, that must end, or life will be insupportable to us both."

"But what do you want, you?" he cried passionately, and he pushed back his plate with a clash against the tumbler behind it.

"I want," said Cornelia, unmoved, "to make both of us comfortable and contented, once for all. I do not, you see, aspire to the unattainably lofty. And the best way to attain my moderate ideal—at least, between people who have no unlimited stores of romance to fall back upon—is plain speaking. I undertake, Hendrik, to do all that you can expect from your wife, or the world from Mevrouw Lossell.

It is in my own interest, if you will, that your home should be comfortable, and my pride will rejoice in any public success you may achieve. You ought to take your father's place in the Town Council; you ought to become a man of influence in Koopstad, and beyond Koopstad. I will do anything, anything to assist you in your career. We must work together, for we can no longer work apart. But I also have a career before me. And in that you must help me. I am going to be somebody socially. I am going to. I am resolved. I should always have desired it, probably, but now, knowing what I know, I am perfectly resolved. It is the last resource left to soft-hearted women, when their nest is left bare, but I am not soft-hearted, and, therefore, in no way to be pitied. But I give you fair, full warning. I intend to arrange my life, and I advise you to arrange yours, so as to get a maximum of second-best satisfaction out of it. We are allies, henceforth, in the war against ennui. Is it a contract?"

"I can't imagine what you are driving at?" said Hendrik, white and uncomfortable.

"Surely I speak distinctly. Your object in marrying me is your affair, if I may so put it. See that you achieve it. Only, that sounds unfriendly, and I specially wish not to be unfriendly. I will help you by all means in my power, compatible with my own legitimate claims, if you will confide in me. I, on my part, will be frank. I liked you very well, and I wanted a position. As for the romantic side, we won't inquire when the honeymoon ended, but neither of us can have expected it to outlive this morning, supposing it to have survived till then. We need not pretend it was ever remarkably robust. The chance of the position remains for me. I married a man with a large income, and I am going to spend that income. I am not going to waste it, and I am not going to exceed it, but I am going to spend it. Is that clear enough?"

"You know nothing of my income," cried Hendrik.

"Yes, I do. Or, rather, I shall. You forget the Income Tax Registers. I shall make inquiries, once for all, either personally, or through an agent. Through some go-between will probably be best. And when I know what your income is, I shall spend, say, three-quarters of it. You can always advertise in the papers, you know, that you will no longer be responsible for my debts."

"Cornelia," cried Hendrik, "I cannot believe you mean what you say, and I cannot imagine what is your reason for saying it. That the registers are get-at-able is true, and it is as scandalous a thing as possible, and means ruin to many a struggling man of business. But you know well enough that they are no reliable criterion, for nobody gives in his income correctly. Everybody naturally puts down too little or too much. And quite right, too."

"And which do you do?" asked Cornelia, with a scornful smile.

"Mine varies immensely, as you can understand, with the profits of the business. Whatever do you want, in Heaven's name? Surely you have enough, and to spare. You talk as if I were starving you. Did you have a better luncheon than this at home?"

"No. You know I did not. What I want? I want you to answer me one question—truthfully—on your word of honour. Do you spend, in our present way of living, one half of your average income?"

"It varies, I tell you, constantly," stuttered Hendrik. "It must be evident to you that it incessantly varies. And therefore——"

"I thought you did not," said Cornelia quietly. "One word more, Hendrik, and I have done. This is my proposal. You treble my pin-money. You treble my housekeeping money. You start a carriage and a pair of horses. I, on my part, bind myself to make no debts, and never to trouble you about money matters. I undertake to accede to all



your minor wishes as far as you can rationally expect. Do you accept my terms?"

"Treble! Treble! You are unreasonable. Cornelia, you are talking arrant trash!"

"Do you refuse them? They are an ultimatum. If you refuse them, I shall not consider myself restricted to any limit, and shall spend what I may deem circumstances to require. You had really better accept, Hendrik. It is the only way, I feel sure, to establish a comfortable compromise between us. There, I am using the word 'comfortable' again. It is the right word. We can be 'comfortable' still. And I have made up my mind to be it. Privation and self-sacrifice are delightful things under certain circumstances, but those circumstances are absent in our case. Love in a cottage is probably charming—at least for a limited period. I dare say one can get on pretty smoothly without it, if only one builds out the cottage in time."

"You are plain-spoken, at any rate," he said, trembling with annoyance.

"I always was. I am convinced it is best in all great crises. For daily intercourse little falsehoods come most handy. They are the small change of human intercourse, but the big bank-notes are best made out in black and white. There, you see how calmly I can discuss the matter. Let this be the last great discussion between us, even though we should live to celebrate our golden wedding. We shall float on smoothly enough on the little currency of everyday small-talk."

"Cornelia," he said hoarsely, "give up this idea. It is all-important to me to save every penny I can. I do not do so from any motive of stinginess, I assure you. It is a daily self-sacrifice."

His evident agitation impressed her. "Confide in me," she said gently. "Tell me why."

"She would not understand!" flashed through Hendrik Lossell's brain. And all the merchant's hereditary preju-

dice revolted from the idea of speaking of business matters to a woman. He felt how useless would be any attempt to arouse her sympathy for the idea which engrossed his whole existence.

"I can't do that," he muttered dejectedly.

"You see!" she cried triumphantly, with a sudden complete revulsion of feeling. "I thought so. And once more, and yet again, I refuse to be bound down to the present miserable pittance. Should we ever have children, there might be reason to reconsider our expenditure. But now I am moderate enough in proposing terms that remain well within the limits of good sense."

"You are like your brother! You are in league with him!" cried Hendrik. "You want me to take Elias's money and use it as my own!"

"Has Thomas proposed that?" she asked in genuine alarm.

"Yes, or as good. You are a worthy couple, the pair of you!" cried Hendrik, overflowing with tremulous passion. "My God, what have I done to be so miserable! I *won't* be bullied into making either a rogue or a fool of myself. Who are you, Mejuffrouw Alers, to talk about a carriage and a social position in Koopstad? Who are you to dictate to me what my income is and how I ought to spend it?"

"I am the woman," she said, facing him tranquilly, "whom you wished to marry for her fortune and considered it advisable to marry without. God is my witness that I would not touch a penny of your wretched charge's money; my brother's sins be on his own head. But the very existence of that enormous fortune, of which you are the co-heir, proves the unworthy folly of your hoards. I leave you time till to-morrow morning. If you refuse to listen to reason, I shall consider that I am entitled to act for myself."

She went towards the door.

"Halt!" he said, intercepting her with his arm. "Do you really mean that you will institute inquiries as to my

average income, and then arrange your expenditure accordingly?"

"Yes," she answered, looking full at him. "Let me pass."

"Do so," he said, "and I will hold up your name to all Koopstad."

"No, you will not," she replied, "for the name which I now irrevocably bear is your own."

In the doorway she stopped for a moment. "Remember, Hendrik," she said in her ordinary smooth voice, "that we dine with the Overdyks to-night."

He did not answer her. Long after she had left him he sat by the disordered luncheon-table, his head in his hands. "I hate the woman," he repeated to himself, "and yet, I suppose, from her point of view she is right. Or, at least, one can understand her not caring to share my lot."

He did not really hate her. He had never loved her enough for that.

The servant drove him from the room by coming in to clear away the things.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### ELIAS'S EYES OPEN UPON THE WORLD.

THEY did not speak to each other again till they were driving home in the dark cab from their rather dismal dinner at Tante Theresa's. They had not met until it was time to betake themselves thither, and on their way to the house they had found no reason to exchange a word. Both were busy with their own thoughts. Lively old Tante Theresa twitted them on their dulness. "You are in love still," she said. "You are as bad company as a newly engaged couple. Dear me, I thought the fever diminished after the crisis. I know mine did; did it not, Edward?" and she laughed a bright laugh to her white-haired husband.

And then she said sweetly to Cornelia: "How especially fortunate for you, my dear, that your husband should be so excessively fond of you."

"Why 'peculiarly fortunate,' Tante Theresa?" asked Cornelia sharply.

"I did not say 'peculiarly'; I said 'especially,' my dear. And pray do not take offence. I must beg of you not to get into a habit of taking offence. In our family we never do so."

"Tante Theresa!" cried Isidor, in protest from the corner where he was playing chess with the master of the house, and gracefully losing the game.

"Not visibly, Isidor. Nobody knows what happens inside us as long as we keep the curtains drawn."

"Wash your curtains, say I, or take them down!"

shouted Isidor, wheeling round on his chair. "These curtains that have been drawn for generations—shade of Gamaliel!—how dirty they have got."

"I wish you would attend to your game, Isidor," interposed Uncle Edward querulously, "instead of saying rude things to your aunt. You are losing, in part through your carelessness. Of course you have no chance against me, if you don't even do your best. Mate again."

"One question, Cornelia," said Hendrik's voice in the dark silence of the slow four-wheeler. "You are resolved that this scandal shall take place?"

"I am resolved," she replied, "to avoid scandal and misery. I think I know better than most women the limits of my own weakness and my own strength. Such a life as you propose to me, Hendrik, is, under the circumstances, impossible. It is simply beyond my strength, because beneath it. I must have something to fill up the void which I feel. At home I had enough of hard work and struggling upward. Perhaps I have got into a way of struggling upward, and must go on. Look at your aunt Theresa, how she scorns me with her smiles. It would kill me in the loneliness of my existence. If I can't have love, I must have envy. We women are poor medleys of strong wine and strong poison. Forgive me, if you can. Hate me, if you will. No, don't, it would be too uncomfortable."

"You are resolved?" he repeated. Her words had flowed past him. One thought only was in his mind.

"If you understood me, you would no longer ask," she said.

He sank back in the musty cushions.

"I suppose I must let you have the money," he sighed. "Not the carriage. I can't give you the carriage."

"We can wait with the carriage till May," she made answer—they were in the first week of April—"it will fit in better with the carriage-tax."

"To give you the money," he said faintly, "means the ruin of all that makes life worth living to me."

"Will you tell me why?" she asked—not gently this time, but incredulously.

"Yes," he answered suddenly, carried away by his hopelessness, "because only by laying aside every penny I can spare, I may still hope some day to be the head of the house of Volderdoes Zonen."

"But you are that already," she said.

"I am only acting partner. Elias owns almost all the shares. I am buying them from him as fast as I can. So slowly!"

"But, Hendrik, that must be a very long proceeding. And, in course of time, they will come to you and Hubert naturally, through his death."

"He may survive me. He is twice as strong a man as I am."

"The dead have no need of money," she said.

"But don't you see," he cried, bending forward in the darkness, "that I am growing richer every year. For the acquisition of each share means a great increase of income. If only I have time—have time——" he gasped in his eagerness. "And think of the future! Volderdoes Zonen! We shall be among the richest in Koopstad!"

"And in the meantime?" she said. "Long years of miserable struggle—for an idea? And at last, when we are old and decrepit, a success we no longer care for. Or, perhaps, your brother's death makes the life-long battle suddenly superfluous."

"But you do not understand," he stammered desperately. "The commercial honour at stake——"

"I have never understood the intangible, Hendrik," she answered. "It is not in my character. I have never taken hold of what I cannot touch. But what is visible I can see as well as most people. I should like nothing at this moment so much as to play the rôle of generous self-sacrifice. 't



looks well, and it is agreeable to one's own feelings. How nice it would be to say: 'My husband, your ideal shall be mine. I will starve myself with pleasure for an object I don't appreciate.' But I know that, easy as the promise is to make, it would be impossible for me to keep it. Let me be honest and deny myself the momentary pleasure which so many softer-hearted people enjoy. But let me do what I can. We may probably come to a farther compromise, as you now bring forward new considerations, which to you seem all-important. Give me the carriage—I cannot do without it: look at this cab!—and a moderate sum for entertainments, and I will leave you the rest, which is probably pretty nigh half, without any further demands on my part for the next three years. We will revise our budget then. But surely you could find some way of making money faster than by merely earning it?"

"Cornelia, you would argue with the devil. He would have had the worst of a bargain over your soul in the good old-fashioned days. I fancy he would have ended by saying that he couldn't do it at the price." His words were light, for at least he had gained a concession, and he could trust his inflexible wife to stick to her part of the bargain.

"I do not understand jokes in connection with religion, Hendrik," she said coldly. She felt that once again, in the tussle, her victory seemed very like defeat. And it was herself that had defeated herself in the very moment of his surrender. A less honest woman, she thought, would at least have got all the credit for herself by promising a little more and performing a little less. The idea annoyed her.

"I am too straightforward," she said aloud, "and too sober. You should have had quite a different kind of wife, Hendrik, one of those women who always get their own way by saying they are going to do yours."

This confession did much to accentuate Hendrik's returning self-content. "You shall have the carriage in May,"

he said cheerfully, "and we will settle about the parties next autumn, and I accept your word of honour to make no more debts."

"But, Hendrik, it is only for three years," she protested, irresistibly driven to "dot all her i's."

"So be it," he answered. "Much can happen in three years."

"You must be rich by then. I am sure you can be if you choose. Not, not by—you know—Thomas. But how are great fortunes made in a short time, if people only have something to start with? Money breeds money, I have always heard. There is the Stock Exchange, for instance. Thomas told me, not long ago, of a man who had made one hundred thousand florins there in ten days."

"Yes; and there is Monte Carlo," said Hendrik, laughing. The carriage was approaching the house, and he looked out at the hall-lamp growing momentarily clearer. He was triumphant at the promise about the debts. That was well worth a carriage, which must be cut down to a one-horse affair to begin with. He would buy a brougham second-hand, he thought, and get a livery-stable man to job it.

He helped his wife out and ran lightly up the steps. A man was standing in the hall behind Mulder. "There is a message from the Villa, Mynheer," said the servant eagerly. "The Baas has been waiting for you for the last half-hour. It seems that Mynheer is not well."

And then Hendrik saw that the man in the half-shade was Elias's head-gardener.

Husband and wife exchanged a glance of passionate question—neither hope nor fear.—"Why did you not send him on?" Lossell inquired angrily.

The gardener stepped forward into the light.

"Mulder said you might be back any moment, Mynheer. I was afraid to miss you, if I——"

"What is the matter with your master? Is he ill?"

"I don't know, Mynheer. I should suppose so, for the coachman has gone for the doctor, and the Juffrouw told me to fetch you at once."

"Call back the cabman! I shall start without delay.—Don't wait up for me, Cornelia."

The servant ran out into the night, hallooing at the top of his voice. But no light was visible playing hide and seek among the trees. Darkness and silence.

"I must go on foot, then," cried Hendrik impatiently from the steps. "Come with me, Baas." And he hurried down the avenue, his mind surging with questions to which no answer was possible at the moment. The gardener joined him, and together they turned towards the road over which Hendrik had already walked in the morning of that day.

When Hendrik arrived at the Villa, he was immediately ushered into Elias's bed-room. As he threw open the door, he heard his step-brother's voice in eager, high-pitched tones. A couple of people were in the room, Johanna, and the blind man's old friend, Dr. Pillenaar. Elias sat at the farther end by the bed, in the light of a shaded lamp, a loose dressing-gown thrown round his stalwart frame. Johanna was bending over him, and soothing him. Dr. Pillenaar stood at a little distance, watching the pair with a perplexed look on his fine old face. He was hale and hearty still, but he no longer visited other patients than Elias Lossell.

"Who is there?" cried Elias, as soon as the door opened. "Is it Hendrik? Hendrik at last?"—Johanna told him that it was—"Oh, Hendrik," he continued, "you must help me. I am sure you can help me. I have told Dr. Pillenaar so and Johanna. You can't know. I am sure you can't know. Just fancy, how terrible it is, Hendrik, there are people in the world who haven't got enough to eat for themselves and their little children—and nobody gives it them!"

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### TWO BROTHERS IN MISFORTUNE.

It happened very rarely indeed that Elias went out at night. And on the few occasions when he obtained permission from Johanna to do so, it was almost invariably on condition that the old lady herself should accompany him. On this eventful Sunday, however, an exception had been made. A message had come up from the hamlet a quarter of a mile beyond the Villa that one of Elias's favourite pensioners, an old man of nearly eighty, was very ill and desirous to see him again. Johanna, whom an injured foot confined to the grounds, had declared positively that her charge could not be trusted to go, but the girl who had brought the request—a granddaughter of the invalid's—had given so distressing an account of her grandfather's restless longing, that Johanna, flattered in her heart by this affection the blind man had called up, had unwillingly consented to reconsider her resolve. "He can't speak to him, Juffrouw, unless you come, but he don't want to," the girl declared. "He's too weak to say much. He says he only wants to see his beautiful face again, and touch his hand in thanks for all that he's done for us, and then he can die content." Johanna could understand the sentiment. She felt that it must be treated with respect.

Elias, upon being consulted, declared his immediate readiness to start. John could go with him. Yes, certainly, he must "see" old Volsman again, if the good creature was worse. And might he take some more of that

strong jelly, and some soup and eggs, and a bottle of wine in a basket? John would carry it. He hurried on the preparations with such energy, that Johanna had no heart to bring forward fresh obstacles, and she saw him go off into the starlit cool spring night, and lingered long upon the terrace, watching the two men out of sight with many doubts and fears, and wondering whether John would remember one half of the injunctions she had poured into his motionless ears.

The visit to the dying man was necessarily only partly satisfactory. Elias could sit by the bed and speak a few words of sympathy—and that was all. “Poor Volsman!” he murmured. “Soon get better. I do hope you will soon get better. I know it is so tiresome to be ill.” And Volsman could only clasp Elias’s powerful, useless hand in his two emaciated ones and lie looking at the solemn sightless eyes. After a moment or two John, who found the atmosphere of the poor little cottage decidedly depressing, touched his master’s arm and led him away. He caught up the empty basket, nodded to the distressed womenkind of the family and walked out.

As the pair turned into the principal street of the tiny village, Elias, who had already taken a very long walk in the afternoon, expressed an opinion to the effect that he felt tired, which was welcomed by his companion as a God-send, so eager are we to consider our vices abetted by the Almighty. For John, who had only been a few months with his present master, had recently established a more or less harmless flirtation with the barmaid of the village gin-shop, and at this moment he was chafing inwardly at the idea of having to pass her door without as much as a smile. Elias’s casual observation procured the lover a too welcome pretext, and he stopped, with a sudden resolve, at the door of the little “Tappery,” and, pushing it open, guided the blind man to a seat by the wall inside.

The little room was close and smelt of pipes long smoked



and liquors long consumed—a flat, unwholesome, yesterday-evening smell. At this moment it was completely deserted, but for a dirty figure—a tramp, probably—huddled up in a corner, half-asleep.

Elias could not perceive where he was, but he understood that John had kindly procured a seat for him in some cottage. He was not really so tired as to require a rest, and the musty smell was extremely distasteful to his delicate nerves, but he had not the heart to appear ungrateful. So he sat down calmly on the bench near the wall, while John dived into the adjoining kitchen to hunt up his lady-love.

He believes till this day, does John, that he spent two minutes in that kitchen. In reality he remained there for more than ten. Cupid may not be so blind as some people like to believe him, but, if not blind, he certainly never has learnt to look at the clock.

Elias, meanwhile, sat alone with the tramp, of whose presence he was at first unconscious. The tramp, on his part, who was not asleep, as John had flattered himself, but merely drowsy, recognised Elias, as soon as his eyes—i. e. the tramp's—had distinguished in the dusky atmosphere the lines of the blind man's face. For this poor wayfarer was a person well known in all the country round, a deaf and dumb pedlar called Jops, and he would not have been a stranger to John, had that enamoured swain caught a glimpse of his features. He often brought up his ribbons and reels of thread to the Villa, and Johanna would buy of him, and Elias had given him a penny many a time.

Jops was deaf and dumb, but he had learnt, like so many of his kind, to read the motions of the lips with a dexterity which minimised the difficulties of conversation with him, if only you took care to speak slowly and to exaggerate the action of the mouth. He could answer you by guttural notes and noises which, though hideous in themselves, were fairly intelligible to those who cared to concentrate their attention upon them, and, in addition to this, he was perfectly



at home in the ordinary dumb alphabet, which he used with the few who understand it.

He had often watched Johanna in her intercourse with Elias, and had long yearned for an opportunity of contact with this great gentleman who was his brother in affliction. How well he would be able to speak to him, far better than all these menials, who never properly took the trouble to learn.

No sooner had he seen this utterly unexpected opportunity, than he slouched rapidly across the room, and, taking Elias's hand, spelt across it with his own gnarled and dirty fingers:

“Good-day, sir.”

Elias was alarmed. “Who are you?” he said. “John, who is it? It's a strange man. I don't know his hand.”

The pedlar quickly told him, and bade him not to be frightened. He would stop if it was displeasing to Mynheer, said Jops. He was deaf, too, like Mynheer, and dumb into the bargain. Mynheer would remember having bought of him. He had hoped it would not be displeasing to Mynheer, he repeated, if he spoke.

No, it was not displeasing to Mynheer. The first shock over, Elias even followed with increasing interest the clear, quick touches upon his hand. How seldom the blind gentleman had an opportunity of conversation with any one but his two or three attendants. He was delighted to find how well he understood, even though the alphabet differed here and there from the simplified code Johanna was in the habit of using. Jops crossed over to the other end of the table, and turned the paraffin lamp so that its light should fall full on Elias's face, and thus entire communication was established between them. This new mystery Elias did not comprehend, but his inelastic brain was content to acquiesce in it. And so they sat together by the soiled deal table in the murky little tap-room—with the glare of the lamp, from which the shade had been removed, upon them and their

sordid surroundings—so they sat, close to each other, bending forward over the juncture of their hands, the simple-brained, useless millionaire, and the quick, clever beggar, linked by their common affliction, eager to make the most of the brief union which fate had seemed to afford them. And in those few moments Jops communicated to his companion several interesting facts concerning himself and his surroundings which had previously been entirely unknown to the lonely gentleman. But of these more anon.

“And do you like going about and selling? Is it not very amusing?” said Elias, presently. “I am rich, as you say, but I am often so dull.”

“In the summer it is not so bad,” answered Jops, “but in the winter sometimes it is terrible. So cold. And often nothing earned in the end.”

“Then why do you not stop in the winter? If I were you, I should sell in the summer only.”

“Stop! How can I stop?” answered the pedlar, impatiently. He was angry with the rich man’s “insouciance.” He had to spell his words more calmly, however, before Elias could understand.

“Who will give me bread if I stop? As it is, I often have not enough to eat in the winter. We can’t all sit in our fine houses like you.”

“But, if you have no bread, the rich people give it you.”

“Not they, as a rule, unless I earn it.”

“Of course you earn it. But if you can’t earn it, they give it.”

“Ha, ha! Not they.”

There was a short pause. Then Elias asked, a little tremulously:

“Are you sometimes hungry, do you mean to say?—without getting bread?”

Jops looked into the beautiful, blind face. Was this brother in affliction fooling him?

“Oh no,” he spelt back savagely, “nor I nor any of the

others. The people who die of starvation do it for fun, with sacks of potatoes in the cellar. And the little children, they like it, too, cold, and hunger, and want."

"I am glad of that," said Elias quietly. He had never come into contact with irony before. "I am glad they like it, though I cannot think why they should. I do not like being cold or hungry, but I do not quite understand."

At this moment the door which led to the kitchen was thrust back. The pedlar saw it begin to move, and, with one dart, he regained his former place at the other end of the long table. Once more he fell forward on his arms and pretended to be asleep.

John came into the room and respectfully touched his master's arm. Elias rose, dreamily. "Do you think we had better be going, John?" he said. "Yes, Johanna might begin to get anxious. Then I must say good-bye, Jops. You must come and see me as soon as you can. I am much obliged to you for having talked to me. I have no money with me, but I will give you some when you come. And if you know of any who want money and can't get it, you must bring them to me. I promise that I shall give it them."

All this, spoken with Elias's wearisome utterance, was, of course, lost on the deaf and dumb pedlar, asleep with his eyes on the table. But to John it conveyed confusion and alarm. He ran to the individual in the corner and shook him violently. The pedlar lifted up a frightened face, which in no wise lessened the footman's apprehension. "Jops, by Jove," he muttered. But, explanations being impossible, he resolved to seek safety in flight, and walked home as quickly as he could with his now entirely silent charge.

"Mynheer was tired, Juffrouw," he said in the course of his accurate and circumstantial report, "and so we sat down for a moment in a highly respectable cottage by the roadside. As it happened, the deaf and dumb pedlar came past,

and, as he pretended he could talk to Mynheer, I quickly came away again."

"In a cottage? You should hardly have done that," said Johanna. "Of course you did not leave Mynheer for one moment alone?"

"I—oh, Juffrouw!—what are you thinking of? It would be as much as my place is worth, not to speak of the danger to the poor dear gentleman."

"It would indeed," retorted Johanna grimly. But, nevertheless, she was fairly well satisfied, as much so as could have been expected, her absence being unavoidable. "You have managed very well, John," she said patronisingly. "I don't wonder you feel personal sympathy for your unfortunate master. But it is pleasant to think one can trust a servant in such matters as these."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### "A FOOL AND HIS MONEY."

BUT when she helped her charge to bed, as was her nightly custom, Johanna discovered that her sensation of relief at Elias's safe return had been somewhat premature.

The idiot was unusually silent, wrapped, as it seemed, in the cloud of his own untransparent thoughts. "What is it, Jasje?" asked the old nurse once or twice. He only shook his head in answer.

Presently, however, when the time came for repeating his few sentences of evening prayer, Elias drew back. "Dear boy, what is it? Tell Johanna. Are you ill?" the poor old woman repeated in anguish of mind.

"Johanna," suddenly burst out the fool with what for him was impetuosity, "why do some people like to be miserable and cold and to die of hunger?"

"Nobody does," replied Johanna. "You mustn't trouble your head about such nonsense."

"Then what makes them do it if they don't like? They don't do it, do they? It's only a joke?"

Johanna had always striven, as far as she possibly could, to keep the knowledge of human suffering from Elias's mind. "He has enough to bear as it is," she would say. "What is the use of acquainting him with sorrows he can do nothing more than he does already to alleviate? These things would only prey upon his mind." So she encouraged him in the theory which he had worked out for himself that the relations between rich and poor were regulated by an incessantly sliding scale of supply and demand.

Nevertheless she had often asked herself whether she was not keeping a source of comfort from Elias. For to her coarser nature it was very plain that we derive our chiefest satisfaction from the contemplation of suffering in others. And so she went as far as she dared, warned back beyond certain limits by a dread of his hyper-sensitive sympathy. "You are not able to see, but you have beautiful flowers all the same. You are deaf, but you can go driving in a fine carriage." A continual balance of plus and minus. You have more privations, but also more comforts than other people. Elias understood that comforts and privations were irregularly scattered over the world. But he had never known that there existed wants which man might perhaps have relieved, and did not.

"Some people are rich and some are poor, Jasje," said Johanna evasively.

"I know. But the rich help the poor."

"Not always. They cannot always. Now, you are rich, Elias, but you are deaf, and blind. Most poor people are not, and are more fortunate than you."

"Not always!" cried Elias, who had only heard the first two words. "Not always! Not always! And if they don't, what happens then? They don't like to be hungry. Nor do I. I don't believe it. I understand. They are unhappy at being hungry just as I was at being blind. Nobody can make me see again, but if you're hungry, everybody can give you bread. Why don't they?"

"Hush, hush, Elias," entreated Johanna drawing him towards her. She wanted to tell him how much is done for the deserving poor, but he broke away from her, too excited to listen.

"I won't pray," he cried. "What's the use of praying, if God doesn't do it? Does God let the people die of hunger? He can't be good, Johanna, as you always say, if I ask him to give them bread and he doesn't do it. Why doesn't he do it when he can?"



Johanna was horror-struck by this wild rush of blasphemy. She shuddered in her comfortable little soul. What to answer she knew not. But, fortunately, for the moment no answer was required of her. Elias stood, away in the shade of the lofty room, his long nightdress falling round his majestic figure, his golden head uplifted in impotent protest. He looked like some priest or prophet of a religion long since dead, in that flowing white garment. The veil had dropped, as it seemed, from his eyes. They were blazing into the darkness before him like stars that vainly seek to illumine the night.

"God will surely help them, if we ask him," he murmured more calmly. "I have never asked him yet, and perhaps he doesn't know. Oh, Johanna, you should have told me to ask him."

And he sank down on his knees and began aloud: "O God, there are a lot of people who haven't got any bread. Please give it them, O God, and clothes also, and make them——" suddenly he stopped. "But they are asking for themselves," he cried in fresh anguish. "They can ask as well as I; and he doesn't hear them. It must be that they don't know about him; why don't people tell them? Johanna, come here to me. Come! If you know about God, for you told me, why don't you tell everybody else? They are dying of hunger because you never told them. Oh Johanna, you are a very, very wicked woman! Oh, how *could* you be so horribly wicked not to tell!" And at this sudden loss of all that he held most dear, Elias, for the first time that evening, burst into tears.

Once more she tried to soothe him. It was not soothing he wanted but the truth.

"Why didn't you tell them?" he reiterated. "How could you keep it only for me?"

"They know, dearest," she answered, pressing him tightly to her motherly bosom. "God thinks it best for them to leave them poor."

"Poor!" he cried passionately. "I am not speaking of 'poor.' It is 'breadless' I am speaking of. Oh Johanna! They are breadless. And he *knows*."

He lay trembling against her breast. A fever spot burned on his cheeks. And gradually he sank into a silence which was not the usual dulness after intellectual exertion, but the unusual slow fluttering exhaustion of an emotion too strong for his powers of control.

His condition alarmed her. She was soon alarmed by anything out of the common in the placid flow of her charge's healthy existence. She felt his pulse, anxiously, once or twice, and then she softly slipped his head down on to the sofa cushion next to her, and rang the bell, and sent the coachman for the doctor.

The movement roused Elias. "What is the matter?" he asked feebly. "Oh, I know. I remember. They are all hungry. He said so. And the children cry. And nobody helps them. What are you doing, Johanna? Are you going to help them? Somebody must!"

She took his hand in hers again. She knew not what to do or say. "I have sent for your good old friend, Doctor Pillenaar," she told him, "he is sure to put everything right, as he always does."

"I want no doctor," said Elias impatiently. "I am not ill. I want Jops; he must tell me more about it, and advise me. No, Jops told me they liked it. He tells lies."

Johanna was more distracted than ever. She felt dimly that the dumb pedlar must be responsible for at least part of the mischief. But how?

"The kind gentleman might help, but not the doctor," said Elias, "the kind gentleman who used to come long ago, and tired my head"—he meant his father's Notary.—"Send for the kind gentleman, Johanna. Send for him at once. He told me he could take all the money that was mine and do what he liked with it. Johanna, perhaps at this moment they are dying like that in Koopstad. They must go and

tell him to come at once and bring all my money with him. And Hendrik must come too. I won't sleep. I can't sleep. Oh, Johanna, you don't care to help. You are a wicked woman, and I thought you were so good." That idea to him seemed almost worst of all.

The doctor, on his arrival, obtained such inadequate information as the agitated nurse was able to bestow. He examined his patient and found him in a condition of nervous excitement for which no reason, it seemed, could be adduced. He was alarmed, for, in the abnormally diseased state of Elias's brain, any complications might lead on to unexpectedly disastrous results. "It is a mental strain," he said. "You must calm him. At all costs you must calm him. His pulse is at fever-height."

"Mynheer is continually asking for the Notary," said Johanna. "And for his brother. But I did not like to trouble anyone so late."

"If he asks for them, he must have them," said Doctor Pillenaar. "Anything to quiet him and give the brain rest." So fresh messages were sent out.

"I must have the kind gentleman to help me," Elias repeated over and over again. "Ask Doctor Pillenaar to help me, Johanna. If God doesn't do it, we must do it ourselves. Perhaps he waits, because he wants us to begin."

When Hendrik made his appearance, the same refrain greeted his ears. The Notary came latest. He had been absent from home when the messenger arrived there. Hendrik looked up in indignant amazement and exchanged a formal bow with the new-comer. The brothers, Hendrik and Hubert—it will be remembered—had quarrelled with their father's legal adviser about the reconstruction of the firm with Elias's money. Notary Borlett was the last man whom Hendrik wished to meet in the idiot's bedroom.

The three gentlemen stood grouped, in an irregular half circle, round the shining white bed in its cold emptiness

and the big chair by its side, on which Elias lay in the dressing-gown Johanna had thrown round him. The old nurse had sunk down by this chair, with one arm over its back. She held her darling's hand in hers and looked anxiously from him to his visitors, and then back again into his troubled, sightless face. Her look said: "Help him! He cannot help himself!" The full glow from the lamp on the bed-table made a bright spot round the little group. And the three men stood in the half-light and looked on, and knew not what assistance to bestow. They were men of the world, men of the clear, straightforward, hard-working mid-day of life; what understood they of Elias's clouds and shadows? The world was cruel, ruthless, crushing all who, through their own unfitness, were not strong enough to resist it. Life was a law of political economy. Statistically it was perfectly correct that a percentage of superfluous humanity died of hunger, and ought to die of hunger, every year.

"Tell the kind gentleman, Johanna," said Elias, appealing to his old friend in fear of the stranger. "Tell him that I hope he has brought all my money with him. I want all of it to be given to the people who have got no bread, and no clothes, and no fires. All of it. He must divide it. Like Johanna does at Easter and Christmas-tide."

The three looked at each other. Hendrik Lossell smiled a painful little smile, and shifted from the right foot to the left.

"Explain to him, my good woman," said the Notary, "that it can't be done."

And Johanna explained. And she reasoned with him, following the Notary's and the doctor's promptings and repeating their arguments. But none of them had reckoned on that obstinacy, which is so often the refuge of the weak-willed.

"I want it all to be given to the people who haven't got enough," said Elias. "All except what is wanted for Jo-

hanna and me. Jops says I have a hundred times more than I require. Of course I know, Notary, that there must be rich people and poor people. But there mustn't be hungry people. Johanna, *must* there be hungry people?"

"I *will* give it," he cried, suddenly starting up in a fury of excitement. "Let me have it. You said it was mine. Everybody says it is mine. Jops told me I could give it away, if I chose, when I asked him. I *will* give it." He made as if he would rush from the room. In vain Johanna tried to speak into his hand. He thrust her away. "You are murderers," he said. "You are robbers, the rich people. Jops said so. I did not understand him. And he tells lies, for he says the poor people like to starve. But I don't believe him. I don't believe you. I won't let them. Give me my money. I *will* have my money. All of it. I *will* give it away. Johanna, send for the police to take it away."

He was galvanised into new energy by his pity and his indignation. He stood opposite them in all the glory of his manhood, his great eyes aglow with love and hope.

"I am a fool, they say!" he cried—by what cruel indiscretion had he, the carefully sheltered, penetrated to that truth?—"but I'll do it. I'll leave nobody any rest till I've done it. You won't. God can't. I'll give it. I'm immensely rich. I can do it. I won't have anybody hungry, Hendrik. Doctor, Johanna, make the Notary give me my money. Take it away!"

"Doctor," said Hendrik impatiently, "give the poor creature a potion and put him to sleep."

But already Elias's fictitious vitality had spent itself. He sank down in his chair, and burying his face in his hand, he shook with hysterical weeping.

"Yes," said the doctor gravely. "The best thing will be to enable him to sleep, at least for to-night."

As the Notary and the Merchant went slowly down the stairs together, the Notary said hesitatingly: "If this mood

lasts, you will have to get Curators appointed, Mynheer Lossell."

"It will pass off," said Hendrik.

"But supposing it were not to, supposing he were to repeat his demand, what am I to do? He may appeal to another less scrupulous man. He is capable of appealing to the streets at large. Look how he has been influenced already by some person who seems somehow to have spoken to him. He is, legally, of sound mind and able to do what he chooses. If he insists upon taking his fortune into his own hand, or upon throwing it out of window, who can prevent him?"

"Are you sure," questioned Hendrik, stopping at the foot of the stairs, "that they would declare him insane? The judges, I mean, not the doctors. You know what endless formalities intervene, and how apt they are to refuse?"

"At any rate, you might try," said the lawyer.

"I can't," cried Hendrik. "You know I can't. I can't have a curatorship on any account. It means ruin."

"The other alternative seems not to mean much else," said the lawyer laconically. He thought Lossell expressed himself in exaggerated terms.

They got into a conveyance which the Notary had in waiting, but they exchanged not another word on their way to the town.

"How is he?" asked Cornelia, coming to meet her husband in the hall, lamp in hand.

"As healthy as ever, only a little more mad," answered Hendrik curtly. And he passed into his own sitting-room without another word and locked himself in.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE RUBICON.

ON the following morning, at half-past six, as soon as the servants were stirring, the master of the house unlocked the door of his private room, and came out into the hall, with white face and rumpled hair. He had not quitted the room all night. What had he done there? He could not have told you. Sat and—thought.

“Somebody must take this note to Mynheer Alers at once,” he cried out. And he threw an envelope down on the hall-table, and fled back into his sanctuary before the surprised glances of the housemaid.

A couple of hours later Thomas Alers stood in Hendrik’s presence, a triumphant smile discreetly minimised about the corners of his thin lips. In his hand he held the paper which had summoned him. It contained no other words than these :

“Come to me immediately, this morning, as early as possible.  
HENDRIK.”

“Well?” said Thomas, running through a whole gamut over the one syllable. He was too wise to begin at once the triumphant praises of his “Syndicate.”

“We must be friends again, Thomas,” cried Hendrik, holding out a hot little hand, “I can’t do without you. We can only harm each other apart, and we can help each other together. I’ll look into your plan, and, if I possibly can, I’ll undertake to assist you.”

"All right," replied Thomas coolly. "You don't assist me, though. It's to your own advantage. You'll make a lot of money by it. And what further service can I do you? For that, I suppose, is the meaning of this sudden outburst of affection."

"Don't, Thomas," said Hendrik, with a gasp as if of pain. And then he told his brother-in-law what had happened the night before.

"Cornelia and I are reconciled," he said. "Everything was settled, and now—now this difficulty suddenly comes looming up. What am I to do? It is desperate. As soon as a curatorship occurs, not a share can be alienated. I am definitely clogged till his death. Even supposing the Court might be cheated into connivance—which is doubtful though possible—the words of old Elias's will cut away the ground from under our feet, and Hubert, or the Notary, would be sure to split. As long as Elias is not his own master, no shares can be sold. It is for that very reason we decided to adopt the fiction of considering him sane."

"I know—I know," interrupted Thomas impatiently. "Old Volderdoes was afraid of step-mothers and step-brothers. He was quite right from his point of view. He wanted to prevent his son-in-law's buying up the business during Elias's minority. He was evidently a cunning old chap."

"And now Elias is resolved to throw all his money to the dogs."

"And if you treat him as a spendthrift," cried Alers, not altogether unamused by his friend's dilemma, "the curatorship comes in again.\* And you are no farther than you were before."

Hendrik sat down again by his writing-table, with his

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\* In Holland the family of a spendthrift can obtain the appointment of a Curator.

head between his hands—in the same position which he had retained all night—and groaned.

“Look hear, my dear boy,” said Alers after a moment. “A curatorship is out of the question. The old fellow’s will makes it impossible. Elias therefore *is* sane, and must remain sane. Always remember that. He is sane.”

“But supposing the curator——” began Hendrik wildly—and stopped.

“It can’t be done,” replied Thomas calmly. “It’s too dangerous. Besides, there is always the second man. You needn’t think Elias’s cousins would consent to your proposing me. One of them would take Hubert’s place until Hubert comes back. No, no, that is impossible. Elias is sane, and you must try to make the best of his insane sanity.”

“But, Alers, if he scatters the money right and left? He will sell all his shares in a lump—at once—now? Who will buy them! I can’t. Some stranger. That is worse even than a curatorship.”

“Nonsense!”

“He will do it. He will get some one else to advise him. He repeatedly said so. He insisted that he was only going to keep a pittance for himself.” Hendrik almost cried with fear and powerless vexation.

“He, with his veneration for Volderdoes Zonen?” asked Thomas sceptically.

“He is capable of anything. A madman. What will you have? He is like a boy of eight or nine. His development has stopped with the beginning of his illness. But he has all the stupid self-will of a child of that age. The Notary says that nothing but a trusteeship can prevent him. He will ruin himself, Thomas. He will ruin us all. He may throw every penny he possesses, the business included, into Jops’s hand to-morrow, or leave it to Johanna.”

“Hush. Hush,” interposed Thomas. “Matters might have been worse. In this country, at any rate, he cannot

make a will without the intervention of a Notary. Be thankful for that. There is nothing for it, my good Lossell, but to accept the disagreeable facts as you find them and to make the best of the whole thing. You must humour him, and thereby you must win his confidence. Instead of neglecting him as you have foolishly done hitherto, you must try and somewhat lessen the too entire influence of Johanna. You must learn to talk to him without her help. And then you must advise him in these matters and keep him from flying to strangers. All this mischief has been done, you say, through a stupid talk with some illiterate person. The first thing to do is to go and tell him that you agree with him, as you should have done immediately last night. You agree with him—entirely. It is your wish, also, that all your money and his should be used for the poor. But if you give it all at once, they will waste it, and be as poor as ever. They cannot have it in a lump. Surely he will be able to understand that. Get him to send for someone else to explain the same thing to him—me, for instance. And then you must start some charity for him—in moderation—and interest him in an industrial colony, or a home for fellow-idiot's or something. Get him to comprehend that his money is being used for the poor—gradually—instead of being wasted. He will be content then. The whole thing only requires a little common-sense and good-nature. You are far too fussy, Hendrik, and too excited, if you will forgive my saying so, for a good man of business."

"That may be all very well," replied Hendrik, "but it remains to be seen whether such a trifle will content him."

"What does he know of the value of money? Why tell him you are only spending a trifle? Leave that to me. We can talk it all over later on. But begin by telling him, as I say, that you perfectly understand and entirely agree with him. By Jove, he is not much ahead of our modern phi-

lanthropists. Only he advocates the practice of what they approve of in theory. There is no profession so smoothly free from all anxiety in our days as that of the pitiable pauper. His income is secure from all chance of diminishment by conversion or reduction or loss. And since the hysterical charity of our soft-brained and soft-hearted nation has taken to supplying a meal altogether free of charge to whoever prefers not to pay for one, well—there is no reason, really, for you to call your step-brother mad. They might at least have stuck to the traditional penny, or halfpenny——”

“I don’t care about all that,” said Hendrik peevishly. “I will try to convince Elias, as you suggest. I will go to him immediately after breakfast. And you are right. I must keep a far closer watch over him. But it is very wearying. I can’t stand the constant strain of this anxiety much longer. Heaven knows what he may do next.”

“Come, come, he has been wonderfully quiet till now,” remarked Thomas soothingly.

“That may be. But you should have seen him yesterday. I had no idea he could be like that, when aroused. It proves that he can become capable of anything. He may easily ruin us all still. I don’t think I should care so much if once he were out of the business. Alers, I *must* get him out of the business, and that more quickly than hitherto. In this way it will last years.”

“It need not,” said Thomas.

Hendrik was silent and thoughtful for a few moments. “He has a will of his own, after all,” he said at last. “I never knew that.”

“In fact, he is not an idiot,” remarked Alers teasingly.

“He *is* an idiot,” Hendrik blazed out at him. “An utter idiot. You know he is.”

“You forget that he can’t be,” replied Alers, with a sneer.

And then they talked of the Syndicate. Presently Mulder came to the door with the morning’s letters. There

was one from Hubert among them. Hendrik tore open the envelope.

He ran his eyes over the thin foreign sheets, and suddenly he broke out into a cry of surprise.

"Hubert writes that he is thinking of returning home!" he exclaimed.

Alers broke into an oath. "That must be prevented," he said. "D——, that must be prevented at all costs, old boy."



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A FOOL'S THOUGHTS.

THE fool sat in his room. His eyes were closed. God had closed them. But from God, who is Light, no darkness can go forth. For his darkness is but other light made manifest. And the fool's soul was light with that darkness which is God's.

He bent his head upon his hands and thought. The golden glitter of his curls swept smoothly over his shoulders. They were his mother's curls. He had never allowed any one to shorten them since his father had told him this in the days of his distant childhood, the childhood which to him was both yesterday and to-day, and, for all he knew, might be to-morrow. What would Mother Margaretha say, if she came back—with Hubert, for instance—and found that Johanna had cut off her darling's curls?

He bent his head upon his hands and thought. Thought, with him, was chiefly consciousness of loving, a pleasant dwelling upon the various names of his little circle of friends. There was Johanna, in the first place, his hourly companion, his constant help—and playmate. She was always with him. She had always been with him. For he could not remember a time when it had been otherwise. Judith Lossell had faded as completely out of his existence as a spectrum drops from a wall.

And then there was Mother Margaretha, whom he did not remember having seen, but about whom he remembered much that had been told him. The vague reminiscence of

his sunny childhood still abode with him. His mother might return. She could still send him messages of love. And so could Hubert's wife, whose name was also Margaretha. They were the same, these two, and yet they must be different. Elias loved the two in one.

And there was his father, who had not been near him for so many years. His father would never come back to see him. They said that he could not, because he was dead. Dead. That meant that you lived in a country whence you could never come out to see those whom you loved. But his mother, was she not dead also? His mother? There was Judith, whom he had forgotten. She had been "Mamma." Mother Margaretha could not be dead. Hubert knew about her. Hubert and Margaretha.

Hubert was not dead, either, although Elias had not "seen" him for many, many years. But Hubert could come back some day; he was always speaking of it. He sent messages. Father had never sent a message since he left off coming. Johanna said dead people never did so, or the letters almost constantly went astray if they did. Johanna believed in falling portraits and cracking mirrors, but that is neither here nor there. Elias knew nothing of these.

He would meet Hubert soon again. But, then, he would also meet his dead father some day. Johanna had said so. And he would meet Mother Margaretha also. It was all very confusing. Where were the limits of life and death?

In love there were none.

And then there was Hendrik. Ah, there we once more returned to firmer ground. Hendrik was alive and well, and came frequently to see him. He came far oftener of late than he used to. Elias liked Hendrik fairly satisfactorily, not with such depth of affection as he felt for his inmost circle, but quite enough to rejoice at his coming. Besides, Hendrik had learned to talk with his brother much more easily of late. And Elias was always grateful when any one took the trouble to converse with him. He would

even have appreciated, on that account, the kindness of the gentleman whom Hendrik repeatedly brought with him, had it not been that he felt an insuperable aversion to that soft-fingered talker. It was wrong to feel an aversion to any one.

And Hendrik helped him in that momentous money-difficulty which had become the "worry" of his life.

Furthermore, there was Cornelia, Hendrik's wife, who came very rarely, and who could not talk to him when she came. Johanna did not like Cornelia. But then, did Johanna like Hendrik? It was wrong not to like good people, said Johanna. But, surely, Hendrik and Cornelia were good.

Everybody was good, except the bad people; and the bad people were all in prison.

The strangest thing of all was that everybody was always telling you to do what nobody ever thought of doing.

And Johanna had said—— What had Johanna said? He forgot what he was thinking of. Johanna did not approve of Jops, and never allowed him to touch Elias, or to speak to him except through her. Elias had been very angry about this, and had cried and stormed, but Johanna had remained firm. After all, Elias could understand her motives to a certain extent, for Jops was bad and told lies. He had said that the starving little children liked to starve. Probably he would have been put in prison, had it not been that he was deaf and dumb.

And then there were Dr. Pillenaar, his old, old friend, who was always kind, and the Notary, who had helped him to give away his money, and there was John, who went walking with him, and the gardener, who assisted him with his flowers, and the coachman, who allowed him to give lumps of sugar to the horses.

And there were the roses and the canaries, and the guinea-pigs, and the cockatoo and the big cat. And the beautiful azaleas, and the camellias, and all the bright treasures he had never seen.

And there was "Tonnerre," whom he had seen. He remembered him quite well. He did not know how long ago it was since he had played with him. For all he knew, it might have been last week. For he loved the little animal still.

The world was full of things to love. Only it seemed a pity one man could love so few. And he, of all men, could not stretch beyond the narrowest bounds of his horizon. It was a grief to him, which he realized at times with sudden poignancy, that his heart was walled in as well as his brain. But only occasionally did he rise to such lucidity of regretful yearning. As a rule, he rested in his calm benevolence, and did what frequent little kindnesses his fettered hand was fit to do.

"And I love you, Elias, you know," he said aloud. "I love you very much. I am glad there is always you left to love, and talk to, and think about. It would be dreadful in the loneliness, if one had not that. 'Two's company, and three's none,'" says Johanna. "I am glad we're always company."

And unwittingly he thanked God for making each man—even a fool—companion to himself.

And then his head grows tired and the clouds come sinking o'er it. It is night, say the wise men; but they are mistaken. Elias knows otherwise. These gray vapours are not the shades of evening, but the mists of a dark noon-day.

"Everybody loves," he murmurs. "All the good people. Johanna, and papa, and Hendrik, and Mother Margaretha, and Hubert, and Tonnerre, and—and everybody. Elias loves them all. Only—only loving them all sounds like loving nobody. And Elias loves one more than another. Only one can't reckon out how or why. Elias loves Elias best of all."

And he opens his great eyes on the world. But he does not know they are open.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### AND A WISE MAN'S DEEDS.

“WOULD you like to come with me this afternoon, Elias,” says Hendrik Lossell, “and see how your colony is getting on?” He has learned to speak quite easily now on the fingers, and the two brothers can converse without any aid from Johanna. They prefer that it should be so. Elias considers it pleasanter, and Hendrik—simpler.

“Yes, I should like to go very much,” Elias replies. “I want to see about little Teunis’s leg. I promised him I would do all I could to persuade Dr. Pillenaar to have a look at it, and I want to know if he’s been.”

So they start together in Hendrik’s carriage, which has been waiting in front of the villa. For Hendrik has a carriage now. Cornelia is confined to the house with a cold. It is not often that Hendrik gets the use of his carriage. He does not want it often. There are plenty of trams and cabs in the city, and he has no time, as a rule, for country drives. He is tied down to his business all day, to his business, strictly speaking, and, furthermore, to all the “extras.” There are a number of extras. Sometimes they threaten to overrun the “teashop” altogether. “Oh, bother Elias’s teashop,” says Alers. The young merchant is Town-Councillor, as his father was, and a man of considerable importance in Koopstad. People sometimes whisper to each other, at Cornelia’s great receptions, that Lossell is very busy. He is really too busy, you know; you hardly ever meet him in his wife’s drawing-room.

Cornelia has a bad cold. And so she is staying at home. For there is to be one of Herr Pfuhl's select concerts in her house next Tuesday, and she does not want the Roman nose to look red.

There is nothing that Elias enjoys so much as going to visit what is called his colony. He understands now, for it has been made very plain to him, that the rich cannot scatter all their money among the poor and have done with the matter. The poor would not know what to do with it. They would not buy bread with it. They would waste it, and then they would be poor and hungry again, and the rich, being poor now also, would no longer be able to help them. It is not God's intention that the rich should make themselves poor, but that they should continue to be rich so as to be able to assist the destitute. It is exactly as Elias said, as he had found out for himself: God made the rich, on purpose to help the poor.

And, therefore, Elias has his colony of unfortunates. Houses have been built, into which applicants are received. Work is provided for those who can work, and all who are entirely unfitted to do so, are cared for, even as Elias is cared for, although he also does not work. Hendrik is very kind, and manages it all, taking an immense amount of trouble, in spite of his manifold other occupations. Elias is fond of Hendrik because of this constant help and protection. He loves him for it. He could never have looked after the poor people himself. He has no idea what things cost, or what is the relative value of money, capital and interest and so on. But Hendrik arranges these matters, and assures him that all his money is spent, as wisely as possible, in alleviating the suffering of his fellow-men. He is grateful to Hendrik for that. It cannot all be alleviated, neither by him, nor by anyone else. Elias does not understand why not. He is vexed with God for not making rich people enough.

And so he goes with Hendrik sometimes, and sits in the



cottages, and talks to the people. And his brother interprets. They are all filled with gratitude towards Elias. They incessantly call him their benefactor. And they as invariably express their astonishment that he can do so much for the poor. They say it is a beautiful thing to be so very rich as he must evidently be. Few people have so much money to spend, and still fewer of those who have spend it half as well.

He likes to hear all this, and yet he does not like it. It gratifies him, and it humbles him. He does not quite know what to make of it. Why does it seem so agreeable to him? For, if God made the rich to help the poor, what merit is there in obeying Him?

He comes home from these visits perplexed yet pleased. And as they drive back together, Hendrik repeats to him what an extensive undertaking the Colony is, and how much money it cost, money which would never be Elias's but for Hendrik's earning it—for "Volderdoes Zonen" has been explained away into "Hendrik Lossell," and one beneficent fiction is fast fading out of Elias's life. It is Hendrik who works hard for the money which Elias may spend on the Colony. "But the money is mine?" Elias queries anxiously. "Oh yes, the money is yours. I work for it, and give it you; and it is yours." Elias throws his arm round his brother's neck, and kisses him in the carriage. With a brusque movement Hendrik pushes him away and then, as if recollecting himself, he gently takes his hand. Yes, Hendrik is good to Elias. In a hundred little ways he is more affectionate and thoughtful than he used to be.

And one day, when they come home from such a visit to the Colony, Johanna runs out to meet Elias with the news that there is a letter from Hubert. And Elias is delighted, for he always enjoys a letter from Hubert. Doubtless there will be a message—a kind message—from Margaretha. He is very anxious to hear his letter. And Johanna reads it out to him, with Hendrik standing by. She first says the

sentences half aloud, as if to herself, and then she spells them to Elias. "Word for word"; that he invariably insists on. It takes a long time to get through. Occasionally, when the letter is a long one, he tires before they have finished. And the second half has to be kept for another day.

"We shall now soon see each other again," writes Hubert. Why does Hendrik start and turn pale? Elias cannot see that, and Johanna does not notice it. "This time it will be real, not an empty promise, as was the case two years ago. You know our plans were altered then"—("I forget," says Elias)—"and Hendrik and I concluded it would be best for me to remain here a little longer. But now I am really coming back, and Margaretha with me, of course, and the four children. You will get to know them all, I hope, and they will be company for you. It will be very pleasant—will it not, dear Elias?—to see each other again. I am writing to Hendrik about it by this mail."

"Hendrik has gone away without saying 'Good-bye' to me," complains Elias a few minutes later. "Why did he go away so quickly, Johanna?"

How much of all this does Elias remember? How much has he ever clearly realized and understood? The wall still shuts him out from the world around him, the prison-wall that casts him back upon himself. And across it flit the shadows, unsteady in their movement, uncertain in their shape. He catches at them, and they are gone. And as he sinks back, disappointed, they reappear.

The fool sits in his room. His eyes are closed.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### TWO RIGHTS AND NO WRONG.

"Do you know what day it is to-day, Hendrik?" asked Cornelia. She had come into his room without preliminary warning, and had stood watching him for a moment at his writing, as if uncertain whether to speak or not.

"Yes," he answered, glancing up in surprise, the poised pen between his fingers. "Thursday, of course. The day of your 'Charade.' I sha'n't forget. If I get back in time from a meeting I must attend to-night, I'll look in. I suppose it'll be very good, eh?"

He spoke indifferently. And she answered him indifferently, or, at least, with seeming indifference.

"Yes, the 'Charade' is to-night. But I wasn't thinking of that. I know that you don't care about it. I was thinking of the date, not of the day."

Hendrik's eyes wandered carelessly to the calendar over his writing-table. "The ninth?" he said. "Somebody's birthday, I suppose. I am sure I congratulate them. Is it Ninnie or Aurelia? It's a good thing you reminded me. Tell me who it is, and I'll wish them many happy returns of the day. I suppose everybody is coming this evening?" He turned back to the papers before him, plainly indicating that he did not wish to be further disturbed.

"It is nobody's birthday," persisted Cornelia. "It is the ninth of April. The birthday of our contract, if you like to call it so. It is exactly three years ago to-day since that Sunday evening when we counted up our 'debtor' and

'creditor' after—after Thomas's visit to me, and made our compromise accordingly. Do you remember? The compromise was to hold good for three years."

"Good heavens, Cornelia!" burst out Hendrik, starting up excitedly, "are you coming to torment me for more money at this moment of all others? Compromise? Compromise? It seems to me you have had it all your own way from the beginning. Look at Margaret and Hubert, if you want to appreciate our expenditure. You have had nearly a year now to watch them in, and to compare between florins and dollars!"

"I do not wish to compare," she interrupted him, dominating his voice with her own. "Such comparisons are useless. But neither have I asked you for money, Hendrik. I would thank you to wait till I do."

"You are always asking for money," he said moodily. "Why else remind me of what you call our compromise?"

"That is absolutely inaccurate," replied Cornelia coolly, pushing forward a large leather armchair and slowly filling it with her stately presence. "Leave those papers for a moment, if you can so far oblige me, Hendrik. I want to talk with you about this. It is seldom indeed that we talk about any subjects but trifles. And I have delayed long enough."

Hendrik shrugged his shoulders. "What's the good of talking?" he said.

"It is unjust of you, Hendrik, to accuse me of always asking for money. Worse than that, it is simply untrue. Since that final contest about the carriage, which you wanted, most unfairly, to reduce to a private cab at the livery man's, I have kept, literally, to my part of the contract. I have never asked for anything but the extra grant for my parties, which you yourself had conceded, and, at this present moment, I do not owe anyone a halfpenny, beyond the customary outstanding bills."

"But you are always giving parties," interposed Hendrik.

"Could I help it, if I would? One invitation necessitates another. Society life is like a rolling snow-ball. You have no cause to complain of my entertainments, Hendrik. Often enough you have proposed them."

"Proposed them!" cried Hendrik; "I hate the stupid, stifling crushes! I keep away from them as often as I can!"

"Nevertheless you have proposed them—indirectly, by saying that we must call upon so-and-so, or accept what's-his-name's invitation to dinner. You business men wrapped up in your computations of prices have no eye for the intricate variations of the social scale. But, as I say, Hendrik, you have no right to be disagreeable. I fancy you would hardly have found yourself a Town-Councillor to-day, had it not been for these very same entertainments."

"Maybe, but you didn't do it for that," muttered Hendrik ungraciously.

"Once more you are unjust. You have always been unjust to me, unintentionally, I am willing to believe, but still unjust. You persist in looking upon our interests as antagonistic. That is absurd, Hendrik. They are identical. I do not deny, for instance, that your Councillorship is an advantage to us both."

"But not your bonnet," he said.

"My bonnet—I assure you it is very cheap for the Rue de la Paix—can only be a means to an end. But I have my Town-Councillorship too, and I am proud of it. Shall I tell you what it was? It was when the Burgomasteress came to me last autumn and told me that the Ladies' Committee for the Grand Bazaar in aid of the Society for providing the poor with gilt-framed Chromographs had offered her the dignity of President, as in duty bound, but that she had proposed to pass the offer on to me, and that the other ladies had approved. The Bazaar could only gain by my

being at its head, Mevrouw Cécile Overdyk had said, the Burgomasteress told me. You remember? Imagine what it must have cost the woman to come and make me that confession! Of course she had expected the others to agree with her in her suggestion that it was best that she should be number two. Oh, of course; that was why she made it!" —a fierce light of exultation flashed into Cornelia's eyes. "Many a better-born woman than I would give ten years of her sweet, short life for such a moment," she said softly. "It is the only field of ambition open to us, and our ambition is twice that of money-grabbing man. Koopstad! Little Koopstad? What said Cæsar? 'Better be first in Koopstad than second in Paris,' he said. Cæsar was right."

"I am sure Margaret does not care for these things," said Hendrik.

"Margaret has her four children to care for. What have I? I have no children."

She was silent. He, too, was silent. Everything in the room was silent for a minute except the ticking clock.

"Avow, Hendrik," she began, with a laugh, "that the result is not bad. I have done what I undertook to do, and the price has not been exorbitant. Remember, four years have not yet elapsed since you married Cornelia Alers."

"Well, if you have been successful and feel happy, there is no more to be said," replied Hendrik, a little bitterly. He looked down at his bureau and shuffled his hand among the papers in front of him. He was anxious to get on with his work.

"I have succeeded," said Cornelia, "and I have not succeeded. I have honestly done all I could to stick to the contract, but things have not come round as I expected them to. It was expressly stipulated that we should be comfortable, Hendrik, and yet we have not been comfortable. We need not talk about happiness; that is a senti-



mental word. I am triumphant to a certain extent. So are you. But we have not been comfortable. And I cannot help thinking that you are to blame."

"Oh, of course," said Hendrik savagely, spluttering flourishes over his blotting-pad, "I have not given money enough."

"Yes, you have, for you have given all that was bargained for, all that I had a right to claim. Strictly speaking, therefore, you have performed your part as well as I mine. But, practically, there is a great difference, Hendrik. Our whole life is oppressed by your constant conviction that the bargain was an unfair one, that you promised too little, and I too much."

"The other way, you mean," he interrupted.

"I mean what I say," she objected sharply. "You too little, and I too much. You have seen how I have worked to keep within the limits you set me. I have scraped and saved, and done marvels with little."

"With little!" he again interrupted.

"With comparatively little. I wish you would not catch me up like that. It is as difficult to make a banknote go farther than its limited number of florins as it is to make a florin exceed its twenty pence. You have no right to contest my transparent good-management, Hendrik. A blind man could see it—a fool, like Elias. There are plenty of housewives in our own set in Koopstad who have control over twice my resources and yet don't make half my show."

"They don't want to," said Hendrik, again thinking of his brother's wife.

"Ah, but they do. There never was a woman yet—I am not speaking of the demented—who did not wish to buy a florin's worth for 'three-quarters.' Even the most wasteful flatter themselves they 'waste cheap.' And the most saintly beat down the price of the missionary flannel. I am convinced that your impeccable Margaret believes she gets her oranges cheaper than I do mine."

"I wish you would leave me to my occupations, Cornelia. They are very pressing."

"But she is mistaken."

"Surely you must have plenty of your own also, on such a day as this."

"Indeed I have. On such a day as this, as you remind me. On the ninth of April, 18—. It is as I said, Hendrik. I struggle—hard—to do my best, and you see it, day after day. And you know that the struggle is unnecessary. That it would cease, if you gave me my due. You betray yourself by occasionally advancing me money before I have asked for it. That is the silent confession of your shame."

"Out of pure friendliness I may sometimes have done so," cried Hendrik, "or perhaps, still oftener, to disarm your tacit attitude of protest." He began to realize how true is that axiom he had always cherished, that you can get a woman to do anything if only you are kind to her!

"It is your conscience, Hendrik," persisted Cornelia, looking full at her husband. She was speaking in perfect good faith. "Do you know, I have often thought of late that our married life would have been happier, if you had been less conscientious than you are. Now, Thomas, I fancy, would not have been tormented by your scruples. But those very scruples are decidedly uncomfortable. You live in a constant dread of my asking you for more money, though I do not do it. Why? Because your conscience tells you I should have a right so to ask."

"Why?" echoed Hendrik. "Because constantly, in a thousand little indirect hints and allusions, you give me to understand that I am rendering your life a burden to you."

"Ah, that is your conscience, Hendrik," said Cornelia, impressively.

"While in reality I am straining every nerve to satisfy all demands upon my purse."

"Your own demand first," cried Cornelia.

He did not answer. He felt it would be hopeless to say

no. As for *his* demand, he still smoked his cheap cigars, and kept a few better ones for his wife's frequent guests. But Cornelia was not thinking of his personal requirements, as he knew. She was thinking of "Volderdoes Zonen."

"And so we are uncomfortable," Mevrouw Lossell went on. "We are uncomfortable because we both have consciences. Having consciences, we realize that I do my duty and that you only partially do yours. In so far as we are uncomfortable, we have failed. For our whole object, as you will remember, was to be as unromantically comfortable as possible."

"What, for mercy's sake, are you driving at?" gasped Hendrik in despair.

"You *must* understand, Henk. I want you to treat me fairly, without any further promptings on my part. The period for which I bound myself is over, but I do not want to appeal directly to that argument. Treat me fairly. Only treat me fairly. There is surely no reason for this continued standing aloof, half in enmity, half in distrust. We have had enough of it. Set your own conscience at rest, and give me my due."

"You want more money," said Hendrik doggedly. "How much is your due?"

"My due," cried Cornelia, with blazing eyes, "is to be treated honourably as your wife, and not, year after year, as your housekeeper or your landlady. It is a pity we cannot understand each other without such very plain speaking, for the people who require that in their intercourse with each other have but a poor chance of sympathizing at all. I am not your servant, Hendrik, to be content with my monthly pittance, and I refuse to have my wages raised. I have not come to ask for 'more money,' as you put it. I believe I represent nothing else to you than an employée incessantly clamouring for a rise of ninepence a week. And you consider you can ignore my clamouring, because you remember I cannot 'go on strike.'"

She rose up out of her lazy attitude in genuine indignation, and stood towering over the writing-table, and the round chair behind it, and little Hendrik Lossell, seated low.

"We go halves, as it is," he barked back at her, somewhat frightened. "I earn the money and you spend it; does that not suffice?"

"How unjust you are, Hendrik! As if I did not do some of the earning, and you most of the spending—or laying aside, if you prefer the term. It comes to the same thing for me. But do not let us squabble. I beg of you, do not let us do that. Once more I ask you: Only treat me fairly. You cannot, in your own heart, think it fair that you should be making, say, fifty thousand florins a year, and that I should continue struggling to keep up our establishment on twenty. You do not think it fair, and there lies the origin of all our trouble."

"Fifty thousand a year!" cried Henkie.

"Never mind the exact sum. The principle remains the same. True, Thomas tells me that you have been exceedingly fortunate of late, and that you——"

"Thomas!" almost screamed Lossell. "I might have known he was at the bottom of the mischief. He is the very best man, undoubtedly, to twit me with my good fortune. I suppose he told you that I owed it to him."

"No," replied Cornelia, "nor did I inquire. I want no particulars from him. But from you I should like to receive them. Come, Hendrik. Trust me. If I bear all the worry, I should at least be told how or why. I can understand that you speculate, and that for this you require considerable sums ready to hand. It is the wisest thing you can do, I suppose, if you are to remain bent upon buying up the business. But let me know about it. Enable me to take an interest in your plans. Only like that, as you can comprehend, will you make my position endurable. Let me understand what I am waiting and working for. Perhaps

then I shall be more willing to bear this daily drudgery. Nay, I am confident I shall be more willing. We should work together, as far as possible. We only provoke unnecessary annoyance by keeping our interests apart."

Hendrik did not answer. He only drew his papers towards him, and began anew to study their contents.

"You will not take me into your confidence?" persisted Cornelia, with a slight tremble in her voice.

"Of course not," he retorted peevishly. "These are no matters for women. Go and dress for your charade."

She mastered herself for one question more. "At least tell me this," she said. "If you succeed in buying out Elias, as you wish to, will your hoarding then definitely come to an end?"

"There would not be the same reason for economy," he answered evasively.

"Then, on your own behalf, as well as on mine, make haste. Thomas tells me he is going to submit a new plan to you which will make you enormously rich in a couple of months. I do not ask what it is. You would not tell me if you knew. I only advise you to follow his advice. For listen to me, Hendrik. I have spoken to you once more to-day about this subject. I had made up my mind to speak to you. It is the last time. I am not the kind of woman to break my word, as I have shown you through these last three years. You have repelled all my offers. You refuse me both confidence without contentment and contentment without confidence. So be it. The subject need never be mentioned between us again. I leave you six months longer to make your fortune and free us both from this dragging chain. Six months to work out your plans, whatever they may be. Do you understand me? I am sick of the whole thing. I shall trouble you no more about it. But at the end of six months I spend—I am released from the promise I once gave too easily—I spend your income of fifty thousand florins a year."



"And how will you do that?" he queried sceptically.

"I? I shall refurnish the whole house over again, to begin with. What! You doubt my capabilities? I could spend five hundred thousand on the furniture alone! And you doubt my seriousness? I have utterly spoilt you, Lossell, by my forbearance. You shall see of what metal I am made."

She turned from him with a look of scorn, and walked towards the door.

"Margaret manages her house on half what you spend ——" began Hendrik in indignant alarm.

She paused in the doorway and fixed her quiet eyes upon him.

"Margaret!" she said. "Leave me in peace with your Margaret. She has other compensations. And she has not the misfortune to be married to you."

With those words she went from him. They were the unkindest she had ever spoken to him in their "uncomfortable" wedded life.

Hendrik remained alone with his thoughts. They were not pleasant thoughts. He knew his wife enough to believe she would do as she said. Once released from the galling curb which had till now restrained her on the road of her desires, she would rejoice in the recovery of her freedom. And the worst of it was that, however wrong he might think her, her argument always put her in the right.

"It is impossible," he said, "to argue with a woman. She never strikes straight; she only fences. I don't even attempt to oppose Cornelia directly. I can't."

When she said that his conscience reproached him for not treating her fairly, she was right to a certain extent. He could appreciate her claims as well as his own especial reasons for refusing to admit them.

"The position is a miserable one," he said aloud, kick-



ing out his foot as he sat by the writing-table, "but it is unavoidable. Escape there is none, look whatever way you can."

And then he smiled a bitter smile at the thought of Alers talking about his good fortune. "It was he with his wretched syndicate," he muttered to himself, "that first started my ruin."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### A STRANGE DUCK IN THE POND.

YES, Hubert and Margaret had returned home from Shanghai. They had now been in Koopstad nearly nine months. And they would have come back three years earlier, as Hubert had at first intended, but that Hendrik had proved to his brother how desirable it was that the firm should continue to be represented in China, for at least a little bit longer, by one of its responsible chiefs. Hubert did not absolutely agree with this view. There were several men in the office, he said, who could do the work quite as well, to say the least of it, as himself. But he consented to postpone his departure for a couple of years.

Then he wrote—as we have seen—to say that he was really coming home this time. He wrote to Elias and to Hendrik simultaneously. In his letter to Hendrik he added that his wife and children would be better off in every way in Europe; the eldest boy was now nearly five years old, the youngest barely fifteen months, and the two little intervening girls were delicate. Another man must be sent out to take his place.

But neither to Hendrik nor to Elias did Hubert state the exact circumstance which had ultimately decided his return. And yet it was very simple—absurdly simple—only it was one of those simplicities which we do not communicate to our fellow-men. Elias would have been perplexed, and Hendrik sarcastic.

Hubert Lossell was the most superstitious of unbelieving

men. He was perfectly reasonable about all matters except his own private little unreasonableness. He understood clearly that sensible Europeans nowadays reject the supernatural as unproven, and he felt the utmost contempt for all the follies of the Romish Church at home or the fancies of the heathen Chinese in the land of ten thousand devils. It was impossible, as he understood, and all Koopstad with him, to believe in anything at all.

Nevertheless, had he found it rational to admit the existence of anything unscientific anywhere, he would have discovered to his own surprise that, while miracles by saints were ridiculously out of the question, he was not quite so confident about miracles by sinners. In one word, had he ever found himself impelled by circumstances to consult the Oracle—not that he had stooped so low as yet—it would not have been to Saint Stigmatica that he would have addressed himself, but to a gipsy with a pack of cards.

Do not laugh at him. Remember, among a crowd of the world's greatest (that is, its worst), the great Napoleon.

Hubert Lossell was not a great man. He had not vices enough. That is to say, he had none of those magnified vices which we call virtues in the great.

He was weak-willed, with strong affections and strong passions. He had married for love, and, after nearly half a dozen years of wedded life, he did not regret having done so. He believed that he had fulfilled his destiny in taking this English wife, as also in going out to China, as, in fact, in most of the acts of his life. He believed in destiny. It was one of the few things he believed in.

Yes, he was superstitious, with the nineteenth century superstition of scepticism. "A man does not will, but is willed," he used to say. "He may rush to his goal like a railway engine, but 'tis fate holds its hand on the screws." He did not say "her," you perceive. He said "its." He was twentieth-century.

And, therefore, when he had dreamed three times in the

course of a fortnight that he heard a voice saying to him: "Who broke the China bowl?" he understood that it was his duty to take his children back to Holland at once, unless he wished to be held responsible for their death. It was an advantage, undoubtedly, that he had made up his mind to return in any case.

So Margaret came and dwelt in Koopstad, with her Dutch husband and her four feeble olive-branches. But these latter were not accepted by the family, to whom she presented them as tokens of peace.

On the contrary, Cornelia was envious, and Hendrik considered that, in any case, it might be called supererogatory in her to be expecting a fifth. As she was. "When a tree has so many branches," thought Hendrik, "they are apt to be covered with nothing but leaves."

And "the family"—the outer circle of Lossells and Overdyks and van Bussens—if the family, as a unit, had disapproved of Cornelia Alers, what must they make of this nobody from nowhere? Her only possible exculpation would have been an "English" fortune. "It is very difficult for you, my dear cousin," said the sugar-planting van Bussen to Cornelia, "to have a foreign element thus intruded into the family. Mevrouw Margaret is undoubtedly excellent, but of course she is not one of us, like you." But Cornelia "did not understand it in that manner." "My sister-in-law is charming," she said.

She *was* charming—to those who are still charmed by simple goodness, accompanied by perennial babies. She had a quiet, kind little face and an unobtrusively friendly manner, and her gray eyes seemed born into the world on purpose to smile to a child and stop its crying. There are many such faces yet in this wicked old world. Alas that there should be far more tears!

Home was for Margaret both the centre and the circumference of a woman's circle. The opinions of female Koop-

stad, therefore, could leave her frankly indifferent. If there was anything that caused her annoyance, it was the effusiveness of one or two young ladies who were suffering from acute Anglo-mania, a disease to which Dutch girlhood is subject, and which chiefly manifests itself in the wearing of moderately "loud" clothing, and the refusal to speak or write anything "among ourselves" but an English which, although very good as a rule, yet invariably falls far short of that absolute perfection which alone would make the affectation excusable. These young ladies Mevrouw Margaret found somewhat trying. They persisted in wanting to lend her books of Miss Braddon's. She did not wish for Miss Braddon. Her favourite authoress was Miss Yonge.

Nor did she wish to speak English more than necessary, for she was eagerly continuing heroic efforts, already begun in China, to acquire a certain amount of Dutch. The result up till now had been chiefly sore throat. She was not a linguist; and the guttural accents of the Netherlands, though not irretrievably harsh of themselves, become truly awful in the struggles of a foreigner.

"The children must know both languages," she said, "and their mother must not know less than the children." "The children will have to speak French also," replied Hubert, his hands in his pockets, his face to the window. He did not like saying disagreeable things to his wife.

Margaret sighed. She felt that life was hopelessly complicated in Koopstad. But the baby—the last,—I mean the latest—cried out from its cradle, and the present once more became plain to her.

The chief object of interest to her in Koopstad had been from the first her husband's step-brother, Elias. He had been almost the only one when she arrived there. "But all the odd little houses, and the trim canals, and the funnily dressed people?" Hubert had said. "Don't they strike you as very peculiar, Meg?" Truth to tell, they did not. She

had seen far more funnily dressed people in China, and also odder houses, and equally trim canals.

Out there, on the hill, in the heavy sweetness of their wide veranda at nightfall, when thoughts of home came creeping up along the silver shadows, Hubert had often spoken of the strangely afflicted head of the house. He had told her simply—long ago—how it was he, he alone, who in his childish fatuity had brought this hopeless ruin upon his brother. He reproached himself, but endurably. "In such a position," he was wont to say, "there is no other alternative than that between resignation and despair." And in fact it was this very consciousness of an all-pervading horror from which he must escape, that had driven him, as soon as he could reason with himself, into the refuge of his doctrine of Destiny. "We do not will, but are willed." "Whether we ride fast or slow, 'tis fate that holds the reins." Least of all could baby Hubbie help it that the flower-pot came crashing down on the hope of the house of Volderdoes.

That was evident. And yet—and yet—Hubert was especially tender to Elias. He had been more than necessarily chivalrous in the vindication of his rights. He felt that he had at least owed this to his brother, to shield him against all further injury, from whomsoever it might come.

He had never forgotten that, in the moment of the sudden push, he had wanted the flower-pot to hit Elias. That impulse of mischievous wantonness stood graven on his memory, immovable through the years. Theories and beliefs might grow and expand and fade away around it. It stood there, denied, refuted, angrily rejected, calmly disproved. There it stood, and there it would remain, like an arrow that pinned all the memories of Elias in a bundle to his heart. "We do not will; we are willed," said Hubert Lossell. But he said it vehemently.

"Tell me of your poor brother," Margaret would suggest



gently. Her heart warmed towards this strange, desolate man of more than thirty winters, who, in reality, was still only an orphan child. "Little Elias," she had said involuntarily, until she saw the portrait which Johanna had caused to be made and sent out at Hubert's request. Then she said "Little Elias" no longer. The large platino-gravure, with its soft gray shading, hung in a place of honour in their Chinese drawing-room. The children knew it well—their sad-looking uncle with the great eyes, and the long hair like a girl's. They called him "Uncle Beauty," and, more from contrast than from any especial appropriateness, they nicknamed the other portrait "Uncle Ugly." They stuck to the original appellation even after their mother had forbidden them to use its more recent uncomplimentary complement.

"Tell me about poor Elias." Margaret had perceived that Hubert liked to talk about this brother of whom he was ceaselessly thinking, even while he shrank from starting the subject. "Our thoughts are constantly with you, as Margaret says," wrote Hubert. It was true. We are all interested in what concerns us; and Elias's affliction was intricately interwoven with the spiritual life of the man who had caused it. Elias was delighted with Margaret's message of sympathy.

Naturally it was this mysterious brother-in-law who most attracted her in the unattractive world of Koopstad. "I love him already," she had frequently affirmed to her husband on the homeward journey. But she had not sufficiently realized the thickness of the barrier between them. She had known, of course, for years of its existence. She had never comprehended what it meant till she stood, helpless, face to face with that beautiful living statue—the useless tears welling up in her motherly eyes.

"Is it possible, Hubert," she whispered, "that he cannot see?"

Her husband pressed her closer to his bosom, and shook

his head. Elias's eyes, alive with their own unmeaning sadness, stared vaguely in front of him, not at the couple standing silent, slightly on one side. The young wife understood that he was blind.

"Will you take my hand, please," said Elias, "Mother Margaretha?"

"Oh yes, I am progressing wonderfully with my Dutch," Margaret declared brightly to her husband's twin-brother, who had come upstairs, after a satisfactory committee-meeting, on the night of the charade, to speak to as many of Cornelia's guests as he possibly could in as short a period of time as he dared to bestow on them. "I am really, Hendrik. You mustn't laugh at me, or I shall avenge myself by treating you to some of it. I fear you have a very poor opinion of my powers. Do you know, it will be nine months next week since we arrived. Isn't nine months long enough to learn a language in? Not even counting all that I knew when I came."

"I am not laughing, I assure you," replied Hendrik. "I remember perfectly well that you talked Dutch on your arrival. Did you not say 'Asjeblief, Meneer,' to the porter who asked you how many boxes you had?"

"You are unkind," replied Margaret gaily, "and, oh dear! so unjust. I do all the housekeeping in Dutch nowadays, for my English cook left me last month. Hubert thinks it best we should have Dutch servants in Holland, and I suppose he is right. I have only Nurse with me now."

"And do you like our Dutch food?" queried Hendrik indifferently, looking round for the next person to whom he must say, "How do you do?" "They act very well, don't they?"

"No," she replied frankly. "In fact, it is too good for me. We are accustomed to plain cooking at home, you know."

"Really?" he said, gazing away in the direction of Tante Theresa's crimson cap. "Oh yes, of course, I remember. Ah, there is Tante Overdyk. I must go and speak to her. I am glad to hear from Cornelia that you continue to like your new house."

"Oh yes, we like it," she answered, drawing back her dress to let him pass. "Of course it is not nearly as grand as this, but there is room enough, and a large garden for the children."

He smiled vaguely, and passed on. The words were not altogether agreeable to him; they were too much like an echo of his own reproachful thoughts. He liked his English sister-in-law, or rather he "appreciated" her, as they say in Dutch, for possessing the very qualities which he had vainly longed for in his own wife. And she? She did not feel any especial softness for the "clever" pair. It was Hubert who always spoke of the "clever" brother. Such an excellent man of business, so wide-awake and energetic, far "cleverer" than he.

That Cornelia was also "clever" she could easily perceive. It was not to be expected that these two ladies would feel much sympathy for each other. They "my-deared" each other.

Margaret was not clever. She was good. But she was a woman. "Of course it is not nearly as grand as this," she said.

No, she did not love Cornelia.

Cornelia sat on a brilliantly lighted "causeuse" up against a mass of variously tinted azaleas (borrowed for the occasion, as was often the case, from Elias's beautiful conservatories). On her right sat Tante Theresa, on her left Cousin Cocoa. In front of them stood Isidor, with Tante Theresa's empty glass in her hand. Refreshments were being handed round in the pause between the third syllable and the last.

Cornelia had on a beautiful dress. It is impossible to remember, at this distance of time, what it was like, but I know it must have been exceptionally beautiful, because I heard some of her fair friends admit as much on the evening itself. Probably, if they saw it to-day, they would describe it as "frightful," but, then, you know, dear Amanda, you say that of last year's dresses, merely because sleeves were still worn low last year.

"It isn't true," says Amanda, with a pout. Oh, Amanda, Amanda, it is. Your taste is entirely vitiated, my dear, because you have no comprehension of the beautiful out-of-date.

The couch over which Cornelia spread as much of the new dress as she conveniently could without unduly suppressing her neighbours was not a low one, for Hendrik's wife was too careful a student of herself to do aught that disagreed with her, internally or externally, and she knew that when you have a long bust and strongly-accentuated features, and are generally of marked, masculine and, as you call it, "majestic" presence, you must sit up in society on as high a throne as you can get and pose, without any attempts to undulate. Undulation, by-the-bye, is never to be got by effort.

"There is John James," she was saying to Isidor, "and Winifred Suzan, and Judith, and Hubert, and the next, if it be a boy, is to be called Elias, I am told. But I don't see the use of my answering you, Isidor, for you asked me the same question a couple of months ago, and of course you don't care in the slightest to know."

"Oh but I do," protested Isidor. "I assure you I think your sister-in-law delightful. I should be great friends with her if her French were a little better than my English."

"I have always considered," interrupted Tante Theresa incisively, "that the names of the two elder children were absurd. Especially that of the girl. If they are to live in

Holland, why saddle them with appellations which nobody can pronounce? 'Winifred'; it may be very pretty, but what does it mean to us Europeans? As well call the poor little creature Chintsjinjunga. 'Winnie,' they say, it appears. That reminds one of a horse."

"Oh, it is the grandmother's name, you know," answered Cornelia, playing with the diamond bracelet on her substantial arm.

"I know very well, but that is not the slightest excuse. Her grandmother lived in a country where people imagined it a reasonable thing to be called Winifred. Margaretha should have stayed there, if she wanted to give her children English names. Hubert is culpably weak."

"Family names are almost always more honoured in the breach than in the observance," remarked Isidor confusedly, depositing the empty glass which had been embarrassing him on a passing footman's tray. "Can I get you anything, Cousin Amelia? That man has Neapolitan ices. Cornelia, undeniably, you do these things first-rate."

"Thank you," replied Mevrouw van Bussen, "I am too old for ices, but if you could procure me a cup of coffee—I cannot understand, Cornelia, why the next child should be called Elias. Surely Hubert's own brother would have the prior right."

"Oh, Elias is everything now," replied Cornelia spitefully. "Poor Elias! Dear Elias! They are intensely fond of Elias. And I dare say my sister-in-law considers he is quite rich enough to afford himself a god-child—or two, for that matter. Elijah and Elisha, like Henk and Huib. We must wait till next time; I dare say we shall come round in a year or two. There will soon not be relatives enough, and they will have to begin on the twelve patriarchs or the thirteen apostles."

"There were twelve apostles, Cornelia," corrected Tante Theresa reprovingly.

"I included Judas," retorted Cornelia, "as well as St.



Paul. I dare say Margaret will have to make up her mind to at least one fox in so numerous a flock of geese."

No, decidedly, Cornelia did not love her sister-in-law.

In the meantime Isidor had returned with the coffee. "I cannot agree with you, Isidor, about family names," said Tante Theresa, who had been inwardly chafing during his absence. "But, then, I can so seldom agree with you. I believe that you purposely annoy me by always saying things in my presence which you know to be improper."

"I speak feelingly on the subject," replied Isidor meekly. "Had my mother thought as you do, I should have rejoiced in the name of 'Jeremiah.'"

"It would have been quite as good as Isidor, and the unbroken continuity of two centuries and a half would not have been ruined by a whim. Are you so much better off with 'Isidor'?"

"Isidor is bad enough," he said with a shrug of his listless, gentlemanly shoulders. "It might do duty as the French for Jeremiah if you like, similarly to Jesaias and Isaïe. In my opinion, calling names ought to be forbidden to parents as well as to other people. The matter is of far too great import to the child."

"How would you arrange?" queried Madame van Bus-sen, with sudden interest. "Surely the mother is a better judge than the State."

"Oh, bother the State! The child would be numbered, or would have a provisional name, till it came to years of discretion, and then it would be allowed to choose for itself."

"You have not come to years of discretion yet, Isidor," said Tante Theresa sharply, "and therefore you would be numbered still. You would be number nought. There is Hendrik coming in our direction, and so you had better be off. You have talked to us quite long enough, and both you and we are in need of a diversion."

She nodded her gray curls and crimson ribbons encour-



agingly to the master of the house, who was fraying a passage towards her, having just bade farewell to his sister-in-law.

"I too have lingered here too long," said Cornelia, rising. She was not anxious for close proximity with Hendrik, after the discussion of a few hours ago. "It doesn't do for a husband and wife to get together; it looks as if they were discussing the guests."

"And the entr'acte has lasted quite long enough already, my dear Cornelia," said Cousin Cocoa, who always made herself agreeable in return for the hospitality she was enjoying. "Do you not consider it would be advisable to inquire what is keeping them from beginning again?"

At this hint of a hitch Cornelia smiled gently: "Oh, the poor actors must have a rest, you know, dear Cousin," she said. "You should remember that it is so different for us spectators, who merely sit still and look on. It is so much less tiring to criticise others than to expose ourselves to their criticism, you know."

Isidor smiled as he led her away on his arm. He was an unmarried man. He could afford to smile at the stabs of a woman's tongue.

"I thank Heaven," cried Amelia van Bussen to Tante Theresa, "that I don't give such parties as this, if that is what the woman means. I know my duty better towards Titus and such of my own thirteen as are still at home with me. She talks of Margaret, as if it were a disgrace for a woman to have children. Those are new-fangled fine-lady notions, I suppose."

"They are a childless woman's notions," answered Tante Theresa, "but Cornelia should keep them to herself. In such little matters one can still always perceive that she is not quite, not quite—enfin!—Ah, Hendrik, how do you do? Yes, they act very well, and I have no idea what the word is. Don't tell me, as I don't want my pleasure to be spoilt. I am enjoying myself thoroughly, and so is Amelia."

"Please let me speak for myself, Tante Theresa," interposed Amelia.

"I can do it much better, my dear," replied Tante Theresa coolly, putting up her gold eye-glasses.—"Ah, Hendrik, there is your uncle Edward, who has taken your place by Margaretha's side. It is very courteous of him, and I like him to be courteous, but she cannot understand him, nor he her."

"My sister-in-law is making rapid progress in Dutch," said Hendrik. "She tells me she speaks it with her servants."

"It is a great pity," remarked Tante Theresa, "that she did not learn French before she came here. If one reads English and German, as I do, it must be considered sufficient. You cannot be required to have all the languages of Europe at the tip of your tongue. Besides, the thing is superfluous. The squabblers of the tower of Babel have long ago effected a compromise, and its name is 'French.'"

"She speaks Chinese, perhaps?" hazarded Mevrouw van Bussen.

"Not she. She has only been ten years in the country."

"Oh, but, Tante Theresa, don't be so hard on her," interposed Hendrik. "She is really doing her best to learn Dutch."

"She is succeeding," said Mevrouw van Bussen. "Only half an hour ago she informed me that she has been able to make poor Elias understand her for some time past."

"Has she indeed? I did not know that!" cried Hendrik, colouring with annoyance, he could hardly have told himself why. But everything alarmed him in connection with Elias.

"Yes," Amelia went on, "so you see her Dutch must be pretty fair by this time, though she is naturally shy about showing it off. And she must have given herself the trouble to learn Elias's alphabet from Hubert into the bargain. It is a boon for that poor, unfortunate, solitary——"

Cousin Cocoa's attitude towards the Lossells had always been one of unlimited pity of their step-brother. "No, I think her very painstaking, and she has a great deal to do with those children, and their simple way of living. No, I like Margaret."

"So do I," said Tante Overdyk sharply. "So does everyone."

"Yes, certainly," assented Hendrik, "so does everyone. So do I. Only, as I was saying, she has never told me of this intimacy with Elias. And I cannot understand——"

"Hush," interrupted Aunt Theresa. "Don't you see the curtain has gone up? Ah, there is Adelheid "en incroyable." Charming. Charming. Sit down next to me, Hendrik, and keep quiet."

But Hendrik was gone.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE POWER OF ATTORNEY.

IN a doorway he came upon Alers, lounging up against a "portière."

"Oh, come out of this," he said impatiently. "I can't stand any more of this, can you?" And he passed on towards the staircase, bright, like the rest of the house, with greenery and hothouse flowers and far-spreading lamps.

Alers lounged after him, with a quiet smile, which distinctly meant: "I can stand it. And I can do without it. I am superior to my environment."

But then, unlike Hendrik, the young lawyer had no nerves.

"Sit down somewhere," commanded Hendrik, as he sank down into a chair in the repose of his own sanctum. "Don't stand about, please, Thomas. Let us get a sensation of rest for a few moments, if possible." He drew a couple of cigar-boxes towards him, and extracted a "company cigar." So much enjoyment, surely—sixpennyworth—he might rightfully appropriate out of the lavishness of his wife's fête. He pushed the box across to Thomas.

"I was thinking," began the latter, as he leisurely struck a light, "how very pretty Adelheid Overdyk looked in that old-fashioned puce. I had no idea there were such possibilities about her."

"No possibilities for you, my dear boy," replied Hendrik, glad of the opportunity of saying something pleasant to his "friend." "The Overdyks are the most retrograde

people in the city. They still persist in marrying each other and vegetating on less than ten thousand florins a year."

"I was not thinking of myself," answered Alers. "I know very well that Adelheid Overdyk is growing gray for her cousin Isidor. Or, at least, she will have to, unless he make up his mind. Now, if my heart were to condemn me to matrimony, I should never make the mistake of appealing to my brain."

"Your heart!" said Hendrik, with an audible sneer.

"Ah, you think we have only got them when we wear them on our sleeves! It is not those who possess the highest decorations that parade them most obtrusively in their button-holes."

"Don't talk nonsense to me, Tommy!" cried Hendrik impatiently, stretching out his little feet and staring at them, as was his wont. Sentiment from your lips *is* nonsense, because you don't mean it. At least, not to me. What is this that Cornelia tells me about some wonderful new plan of yours? Another syndicate? I wish you wouldn't speak of these matters to Cornelia."

"I spoke of it to her as a private affair of my own," answered Alers carelessly, watching the bluish clouds from his cigar. "I didn't trouble you about it, because I had understood you to say you were never going in for anything speculative again."

"How can I have said that," protested Hendrik irritably, "after the mess I have got into? It is all very well to cry out: 'I will stop!' when you've gone over the cliff. What am I to do, if Hubert finds out?"

"Hubert will not find out."

"But supposing he does? The whole thing may flash on him at once from some stupid word of Elias's. They are always with Elias nowadays. The children are sent over to play with him. And Hubert goes almost daily to visit him, as my father used to do. And now I have just

heard that my sister-in-law has been quietly busy for some time practising her elementary Dutch on his neck and hands."

"Ah, that was your mistake," said Alers; "you should have kept Hubert away a couple of years longer, and then all would have been right."

"I? As if I could forbid his returning. I had hard work enough, as it was, to obtain any respite at all. And you said exactly the same thing at the time, I remember. 'Could you keep him out yonder a couple of years, then all would come right!' Well, I succeeded in doing so; and what's the result?"

"If there were not always an element of uncertainty in these matters," said Alers, "I should no longer be a poor struggling lawyer, but a *millionnaire*."

"You denied the element of uncertainty in the syndicate," said Hendrik, "and the day after you had denied it, the subscription failed completely. I had to take up every penny of the sum I had guaranteed."

"I know that," assented Alers impatiently. "I can't help it. Whoever could have thought the public would have behaved so idiotically? Well, the shares stand in Elias's name. They will be worth a lot of money some day."

"Will you take them at ten per cent.?"

"How often must I tell you I am not a capitalist, Hendrik? What's the use of crying over spilt milk? Don't let's talk of money matters. I didn't begin, though I really believe I have got a good thing this time. I'd quite as lief keep it dark. Let us talk of the company upstairs. Listen, that is young Titus van Bussen singing!"

"Ah, but I would much rather talk of the money. It was that abominable syndicate, Alers, which first compelled me to invest Elias's money in shares. I had never done so before; I should never have done it of my own free will."



"It was not the syndicate," replied Alers, "which induced you to buy the petroleum."

"It was," retorted Hendrik, "for I thought it would be certain to go up one florin per barrel, and that would just about have covered the deficit from that syndicate of yours."

"That's right, Henk. Never lay the blame on yourself," said Alers. "By-the-bye, how is petroleum to-night?"

"Gone down another fifty. That completes the third florin," answered Hendrik moodily.

"Whew!" said Thomas slowly. "One hundred thousand barrels, and a fall of three florins per barrel! That makes three hundred thousand florins, Henk."

"Don't I know?" cried Hendrik fiercely. "Do you fancy I can no longer reckon out three times one are three? What a fool you are, Alers! Can't you leave a fellow alone?"

"Let us talk of the singing," said Alers. "Did I not suggest so before? It appears that they are encoring young Titus. How conceited he will be!"

"The last payment is due on Monday week," burst out Hendrik. "I can't hold on. I shall have to sell. I must have three 'tons'\* by that Monday, Thomas. If I don't, I am ruined. And where to get them I cannot tell. In fact, I can't get them. Of course not."

"What will you do, if you don't?" queried Thomas, again watching the blue rings of his cigar.

"I don't answer," said Hendrik abruptly.

"Good heavens, Hendrik, you don't mean to say you are such a fool as to think of doing something desperate? Talk of calling me names. I return the compliment."

"Am I the sort of man who kills himself?" said Hendrik, with a sickly smile.

"Everybody is," answered the lawyer. "All that is re-

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\* Three hundred thousand florins.

quired is the sort of case. Every one of us can go mad except the idiots. I believe you will survive everything, Hendrik, except commercial disgrace."

"Take another cigar," said Hendrik.

"By ——, you are in earnest!" cried Alers in horror-struck tones. There was a moment of silence between them. The jingle of the music came rippling its laughter from upstairs.

"This is too horrible," continued the lawyer. "Don't let's talk of such things. It attracts them. Surely matters are not as desperate as you say."

"I must have the money. Any child can understand that." Again a short silence.

"You have that power of attorney still," says Alers presently. "The deed signed by Elias at the time to enable you to take the syndicate money off the Great Book of the National Debt."

"You know the thing was only valid for a year."

"But my friend Linx, as he was willing to make out one for you, would doubtless be quite ready to repeat the operation."

"Don't you see there is Hubert?" cried Hendrik. "If we take Linx to Elias now, Hubert is sure to find out all about it, and then I am lost."

"Take Hubert into your confidence. Make a clean breast of it. After all, you have done nothing wrong."

"I can't," said Hendrik, "I simply can't. Hubert has the absurdest ideas about our duty to Elias. He is chivalrous. And mystical. And—Heaven knows what. We don't understand each other. If I told him, he might run to the Police."

"Don't be a child, Hendrik. I repeat, you have done nothing wrong. You decided to advise Elias to take some of his money out of Government Securities, and to invest it in shares. As the law requires a power of attorney to enable you to represent your brother, the necessary deed was made

out by my friend, who is a competent Notary, and signed by Elias. The shares may be worth any sum in a year or two."

"Hubert wouldn't understand," repeated Hendrik, shaking his head.

"As for your other speculations, those have nothing to do with the matter. But now you have got into a mess. What you want is—speaking plainly—for Elias to advance you the money. Hubert must help you in that. Your next speculation will succeed, and you will repay it. That is all. I am certain that, if Hubert understands in what degree the honour of the house, of the name, is involved, he will come to appreciate his personal interest in the matter."

"I daren't do it," persisted Hendrik. "It is exactly as you say. And quite true. But I daren't do it. If it were ten thousand, perhaps, or twenty, I might! But not three hundred thousand. I daren't."

"Then, my dear Hendrik, you will go smash."

"There is always one comfort," replied Hendrik in a low voice. "That the complete smash is the finale."

"Look here," said Thomas, once more alarmed. "Let me tell you first what this plan is about which I dropped a word to Cornelia. I had hoped it would have made your fortune once for all. As it is, it may help you out of your difficulty."

"You can tell me," answered Hendrik incredulously, "if you like."

"You know the South Sumatra Tobacco Company?"

"Of course," said Hendrik testily. "Its shares are on 'Change. They touched five hundred above par a week ago. Their last dividend amounted to thirty per cent."

"Just so. Well, I am in a position to assure you that they will declare fifty-five at their next meeting on the eighteenth."

"On the contrary," answered Hendrik. "That shows

how little you know about these matters. I have heard it confidentially whispered that the very reverse will be the case."

"I know," said Thomas imperturbably. "In fact, I know more than you think. It is being 'confidentially whispered,' as you say, that the year has been a bad one. We are all aware of the instability of these tobacco-shares. The South Sumatra Company's are going down. They will sink very near five hundred in a few days, you will see. And the day after the public meeting, they will be up to eight hundred at least."

"I dare say!" said Hendrik.

"Why not? Arendsburgs are at one thousand and twenty."

"And who gave you this valuable information?"

"That is my secret. No, I will make it ours. Truth to tell, my informant is no less a person than one of the board of directors. If you swear secrecy, I will tell you his name."

"All right. I swear."

But Alers insisted upon an oath in *propria forma*. He was so evidently in earnest that Hendrik grew impressed.

"It is Lankater," said Thomas. "I had occasion recently to do him some considerable service, in a professional way, in connection with his wife. You understand me. Divorcee made easier. Well, he gave me this hint."

"I can't, Thomas," said Hendrik. "You must forgive me. Not after the syndicate. I daren't. And there was that other affair, besides, in which you were mistaken. I daren't do it."

"I assure you this is genuine," cried Thomas vehemently. "I really want to help you. You're in a most terrible fix, and I was delighted with an opportunity for coming to your assistance. I can't think what you'll do if you don't struggle out."

He was honestly alarmed. And it was perfectly true,

as he repeated, that his information, as well as his anxiety to help his brother-in-law, could be looked upon as bonâ-fide. He had really availed himself of this opportunity. It was in his interest also that Cornelia's husband should not go down in the sea of disgrace.

But Hendrik, being a burnt child, hung back from these bright allurements.

"Look here," cried Thomas in final despair. "I will tell you what I can do; and there's not another man for whom I would do it. I will shut you up in the big wall-cupboard—you know—in my office, and—by George—you shall hear Lankater repeat the news to me yourself. Will that suffice you?"

"You are very much in earnest," said Hendrik musingly. "I believe Lankater to be an honest man."

"Of business," said Thomas.

"Of business," said Hendrik.

"You shall hear the truth from his own lips. And then, when you know it to be exactly as I say, you must buy one hundred shares—do you understand me?—one hundred shares as near five hundred per cent. as you can. In a couple of weeks you can sell them again at eight hundred per cent."

"It is too gigantic," murmured Hendrik.

"Is your need so small?"

"No, but it is easy enough to say: 'Buy shares.' Where am I to find the money? Half a million, by Jove!"

"Bankers?" suggested Thomas.

"Impossible. Every bond I possess has been used as security long ago. Besides, half a million? No, the bankers must be left out of the concern."

Again a silence, a long one this time. And the jingle of fresh music upstairs.

"You *must* have the money," said Alers. "It is as you say. There is no alternative. And, besides, it is a case of complete ruin on one side, and complete salvation on the

other. This is no time to hesitate. Where is the power of attorney? Let me see it."

"But it is absolutely useless!"

"Let me see it."

Hendrik got up, opened one of the drawers of his bureau, and produced the document.

His friend took it and scanned it hurriedly. Then he read it over again, slowly.

"It would be impossible to alter the dates," he said softly, almost to himself.

"Thomas!" cried Hendrik, starting from his chair with livid face. His cigar fell to the floor. He did not observe it. An immensity of sincerest horror weighed down the single word. It seemed to linger heavy on the air of the silent room.

The young lawyer looked up quickly, struck to the heart by the fierce emotion of the cry. He smiled. "I was only joking, of course," he said. "These fellows take sufficient precautions against so easy a 'circulating library'-solution as that."

"Some things are not fit subjects for joking."

"True, your situation is too desperate for you to relish a joke. Well, I must think out some method of assisting you. I shall ask Linx whether the validity of this document cannot be prolonged. Your over-scrupulous conscience would have no objection, I suppose, if you were absolutely certain of the success of this dividend-business, to purchasing a hundred South Sumatra shares for Elias to-day, and to buying them back of him at the same price in a week or two."

"If I were absolutely certain," said Hendrik hesitatingly. "No."

"All we want is the loan of a few hundred thousand florins out of Elias's Government Stock for a very brief period," said Thomas, rising to his feet. "We must see that we get them."

"You can't," reiterated Hendrik.



"We must see, my dear Right Worshipful. I must deliberate. But one thing, if you please. If I arrange this matter for you, it is understood, that twenty-five per cent. of all profits go to me."

"Why?" asked Hendrik, taken aback.

"Why? Because the whole transaction is practically mine. Who told you about the South Sumatra Company?"

"So be it, Thomas. But I don't move a step till I have heard Lankater, as you promised just now."

"You shall hear him to-morrow, or the day after. And we will put down our own little agreement about my share on a scrap of stamped paper. It is always simplest to be accurate in these matters. And now that is settled, I had better be going upstairs again. The whole thing will be pretty nigh over by this time." He put down his unfinished cigar on an ash-tray, and, carefully folding up the legal document, slipped it slowly into the inner pocket of his dress-coat.

"Give me back that paper," said Hendrik anxiously, holding out his hand.

"I may as well show it to Linx, and ask him what he advises. You are perfectly sure that you could not get Elias to consent to signing another?"

"Perfectly sure. Both he and Johanna would consult Hubert at once."

"Well, I dare say Linx will see his way to obtaining a fresh recognition. There is no reason, really, you know, for restricting these things to a twelvemonth. No moral reason, certainly. Only one of expediency. Aren't you coming up? Not to your own party? Not feel festive, I suppose? Leave all that kind of thing to Cornelia? Ta, ta, then."

"It is worth while," said the young lawyer to himself, as he slowly mounted the broad staircase among the flowers and the perfumes and the lights. "It would be a risky thing, perhaps, if the chance of success were less

certain. But the money will undoubtedly be paid back again in less than a fortnight, and then, should anything happen to leak out, Hendrik will be able to take the blame upon him as regards Hubert. Nothing succeeds like success."

"Twenty-five per cent.," he added, as he turned into the crowded supper-room. "For me it will mean, as for Hendrik, escape from otherwise irretrievable ruin. Does he think I am doing it all for Cornelia's husband? The magnitude of our need would excuse every measure imaginable.—Ah, how do you do, van Bussen? Your singing was excellent. The whole of that scene, I thought, was particularly good. Have they found out the word?"

Hendrik sat in the loneliness of his own room, his head bent forward between his two hands. He sat quite still. Once only he groaned aloud, and then coughed nervously, as if to cover the groan from himself.

"Is it possible," he thought, "that I have sunk so low, and that my need is so terrible, that Alers could speak to me of altering dates?"

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE MESSAGE OF ETERNAL SPRING.

MARGARET was sitting by Elias's side on that breezy April morning. She had laid her hand upon his, in token of silent companionship. "Was he thinking?" she asked herself as she looked up into his unmoved face. "Or dozing in the dulness of his day-dreams?"

From the farther end of the grounds, by the stables, the voices of her children would come over occasionally, borne hither and thither on gusts of the fresh spring wind, cries of laughter and shrill excitement, or of sudden protest and passion, intermingled with gruff uproar from the great, deep-throated St. Bernard. They were playing out yonder, under the supervision of their English nurse, the two who could run and the two who could toddle. The woman must have found her hands pretty full.

And over the wide stretch of garden, already restless with unreasoning impulses under its hard black coverlet, over the lofty clear sky, a-tingle with movement, and the gaunt tops of the distant trees, rocking naked and desolate—over all this lay that strange sensation of awakening, when life is still half asleep yet nevertheless alert and alive.

Dame Nature was sitting up in bed and rubbing her eyes, and coughing.

The children felt it, unconsciously. And they ran the faster—the two who could run—and the red-jacketed toddlers toddled the more briskly—for this newness of

health that was in them, and in the slender twigs and sinewy branches, and in all the cracking, bursting, breaking soil that seemed to heave under your feet, as if a giant were tossing underneath in his slumber. And already a faint haze and glimmer of earliest green played here and there across the blackness. You looked down, at your feet, and you could not trace it, but you looked up again, across the whole field, and there it lay. Already, too, the birds were chirping to each other, in little sudden, occasional breaks, tentative snatches of music, influenced, not so much by the joys they actually experienced, as by those which they felt to be coming. You might have said that they were tuning up for the great concert, only that those cheap, little home-made instruments of theirs are never out of tune.

"I am happy," said Elias, quietly, placidly. She looked up again, and saw that he was not asleep, not even dreaming, but thinking, thinking hard, for him. "I am very happy. This kind of wind always makes me feel as if something delightful were going to happen, as if all the old delightful past were coming back again. I am happier, I think, since you came back to me, Mother Margaretha. I wish you had never gone away. And why don't the others who have gone away come back to me, Papa, and—and Tonnerre? I want them back. Is it wrong to want back Tonnerre almost as much as I want Papa?"

"No," replied Margaret, wondering to herself whether wiser people would not say "Yes."

"I think they ought to come back to me. Johanna says they can't, because they are dead. But Johanna must be mistaken, because she said you were dead; and you have come back. As soon as you came back and were kind to me and taught me, I remembered all about it—I don't think I had ever quite forgotten—and I understood she must be wrong. Where are they, Mother Margaretha? Why don't they come? Why do some people live in our hearts only, and others in our hearts and our houses, too? What is it

they call 'being dead'? Johanna says dead people can't hear or see or taste or feel or anything. They don't know anything about anything, she says. I don't know much, and I can't hear or see. Am I nearly dead?"

Before she could find fitting reply, he caught up the tangled thread again, and continued in his slow, lumbering way :

"It's not true, what Johanna says about their not knowing. I don't mean 'not true,' but I mean she doesn't know, as when she said the poor people liked to be hungry. The dead ones, as Johanna calls them, go on loving you, and you go on loving them"—his clear voice sank to an awe-struck whisper—"I know about that. And you must know it all, and can tell me, Mother Margaretha, because Johanna always said you were dead. Or was she mistaken about that, and were you never *quite* dead—dear—more like me?"

Conversation with Elias was very laborious for his English sister-in-law. She understood him better than she understood most of his compatriots, on account of the slowness and simplicity of his speech, but to answer him she must carefully spell every word she employed. Still, even here, she had the advantage of unlimited leisure. On the whole—in spite of difficulties—she preferred a talk with the deaf man to most of her other struggles in Dutch. She only regretted that the capabilities of communication should be so restricted. Understanding that in many matters Elias had remained stationary, she had taken her intercourse with her own eldest boy as a more or less satisfactory model to imitate, but she could not help perceiving the frequent divergencies between a growing and a grown-up child. She did her best, striving to complete Johanna's work, without exciting the old woman's jealousy. To increase Elias's fund of general knowledge, she was soon obliged to admit, seemed a hopeless as well as a useless undertaking. She concentrated whatever influence she had—and to her joy she

saw it daily deepening—upon the effort to give him some conception of the fundamental truths of the Christian Faith. Johanna was naturally jealous, in spite of all precautions. But she loved her charge too well to show any annoyance at a new state of affairs which evidently procured him both pleasure and profit. She slipped into the background, sadly but silently. And therein, surely, lies the very mastery of love.

Margaret plodded through the "Peep of Day" with Elias, translating as much as even he could understand and remember into her own broken Dutch. Johanna had taught the fool a large morality, but she had never spoken to him, at all clearly or systematically, of revealed religion as such. From "Mother Margaretha's" lips he now first heard the story of the Lord Christ: the Child Christ, the Christ on the Cross. It impressed him somewhat as it might come home to the heart of a savage from African forest-depths, always supposing the savage to be a man of naturally generous impulses. He could not fathom it clearly; he could not always remember it accurately, but instinctively he accepted it as deeply human, immeasurably divine, and his heart, struck to its centre by the new, strange, glorious revelation, uncovered before it and sank down adoring, as in the visible presence of God. "The Lord," he would repeat softly to himself in loving, solemn accents, sometimes taking up the refrain from time to time and lingering over it with a flow of hidden meaning. What was he thinking of at such moments? Margaret hardly dared to ask him. Though he would speak at times, out of the fulness of his own reserve, yet, on the whole, he was silent and sensitive, and would almost seem to resent being questioned. Those who knew him best could but admit that they knew him in parts. You cannot see more than patches of blue in a sky over which the clouds are hurrying. But you can comprehend at a glance that the essence of that sky is light. And they whose eyes



watched most faithfully for the breaks in the mists of the poor fool's being, understood that its one unalterable, oft-intercepted light was love.

And to him the Divine Man became a living, light-giving reality, for in the silence of his Holy of Holies, before which God Himself had drawn the curtain, the Shekinah could burn forth with steady radiance; it is we, not the Builder of our Tabernacle, who refused to rest till we had torn open the veil, and had let in the naked glare of our soul-selling and wisdom-mongering upon the unsullied purity enshrined within. Elias dwelt, God-protected, in the solitude. And he touched the Wound in the Sacred Side, and sank down to kiss the hem of a Garment which rustled audibly upon his deafness, and in the great silence—unpeopled but by some few Priests of Love—he heard, as the sharp-eyed, the loud-voiced, have never time to hear it, the Accents of the Sacred Voice.

“We would see Jesus,” say, sick with staring, they who transparently see everything but Him in the Heavens above and the Earth beneath and the Waters that are under the Earth. The blind man, who knew nothing of microscope or telescope, said, “I see Him,” and was at rest. He saw Him because of the darkness? So be it. So do men see the stars.

Did I not tell you, Fellow-Koopstader, that my story was a bright one?

“But I am not Mother Margaretha, Elias,” spelled Margaret, with affectionate caress. “Don’t you remember I told you so before? I am come to remind you of her. Perhaps I am like her. I love you also as she did.”

“I remember,” said Elias sadly, so sadly that again she wondered, as she had done before, whether it was worth while to undeceive him.

After a time he added: “I did not want to be reminded

of her. I have never forgotten. Where is she? Where are the dead people? Why don't they come back?"

"They live with God," answered Margaret.

"But God is everywhere, says Johanna. And so do you. If God can live with me and with my dead people, isn't it unkind of Him to live with both of us apart?"

"Hush, hush, Elias. No. He knows it is better for you to live here now, and He will bring you to them afterwards."

"And does Tonnerre live with God too?"

When Hubert came presently to fetch his party home, he found the four children, even the smallest, romping frantically with their big, blind uncle amid shrieks of hyperhilarious glee. They were struggling to get at the sweets which they knew to be secreted in various pockets all over his wide expanse of Scotch tweed, or firmly enclosed—the non-sticky-ones—in the clutch of his powerful hands. Small arms and legs were all over him, small feet especially numerous according to the rule which seems to provide every tiny morsel of humanity that clambers over you with half a dozen active kickers at the least. Small fingers were struggling and tugging and thumping. Small voices—small but shrill—were clamouring and pleading and gasping, forgetful that this uncle could do nothing but feel! Ah, how he could feel! His voice rose loudest of all, as he remonstrated, reproached, roared with laughter and triumphant challenge. Even the baby was vainly trying to compass one of his legs. Margaret drew her arm through her husband's, and together they stood watching, with a pitiful smile upon their faces.

## CHAPTER XL.

### A FLASH OF LIGHT.

"HUBERT," said Elias—they were alone together. "I want you to take me to see my poor people. Hendrik never takes me now. He says— Oh, I forgot!" Elias stopped suddenly. He puckered up his lips, and then, after a vain effort to control himself, he gave way, and, to his brother's surprise and dismay, burst into tears.

"What is it?" queried Hubert anxiously, seizing the deaf man's hand. "What is it, Elias? Dear boy!"

It was some time before the distressed man—I had almost written "child"—was sufficiently composed to give a reasonable reply, and then he would only say: "No, he had meant nothing. He had made a mistake. He had forgotten." He grew quite agitated. "Let us talk of something else."

"But I am very willing to talk to you about your poor," said Hubert. "Whom do you mean by your poor? The people who come to your gate so regularly? That wretched Jops, whom Johanna so especially dislikes, I often wonder why?"

Elias's forehead twitched nervously at the mention of the deaf and dumb pedlar.

"No, no," he reiterated. "There are no poor. I mean that was not it. It's nothing. Hush, Hubert, don't you hear my canary beginning to sing?"

They were both silent, and Hubert stood, perplexed, gazing at the deaf man before him and listening to the bird.

"It sings better than its father did," remarked Elias after a while. "I am glad it was born here. It is quite my canary, this one. I am glad it sings so well. Don't you think it does?"

"Yes," replied Hubert.

"A bad man came," Elias went on, with a sudden burst of indignation, crimsoning all over, "and wanted to sell us a poor little singing-bird, and he had put out its eyes to make it sing better. Just fancy that, Hubert. I wanted to seize him and put out his eyes with my fingers. I think that would have been right. But Johanna said I mightn't." This incident had happened several years ago, but Elias had forgotten that. "I have sometimes thought since," he added, "whether God puts out some people's eyes to make them sing better—in their hearts, I mean. Because Mother Margaretha says we must always sing to God."

Hubert did not answer.

"She says we must all be like Christ," the blind man continued. "Do you know, Hubert" — pensively — "I think I am very much like Christ, almost altogether like Christ."

"What can he mean?" thought Hubert, who knew too little of Christ to understand that any man could in any way be like Him.

"She says that Christ gave up everything for everybody who had nothing. Well, you know I did that, as well as I could. Almost. Only not quite. And I have been thinking I should like to be, not 'nearly like Christ,' but 'exactly like Him.' There is the carriage, now. I don't want the carriage, for I can walk very well. I can walk a great deal better than Johanna. And therefore, Hubert, I want to give the carriage to the lame man at my cottage. He needs it much more than I do. But I wanted to ask you about it, before I spoke to Hendrik, because you gave me the carriage, and it was very good of you, Hubert. I know you have always wanted me to keep it, but you will let me give

it to lame Laurens, won't you?"—his voice became pleading, and he opened his eyes and turned them on his brother—"when you see how far I can walk, and remember that we must all be exactly like Christ?"

"We shall see," spelled Hubert, not knowing what to decide.

"You mustn't think that it is because I don't care for it," Elias went on eagerly. "I like it. At least" (a concession to his strict regard for truth), "I like the horses very much. And I shall miss patting them and giving them sugar. Look here, Hubert, I want to tell you something—I didn't want to at first, because I was afraid you might think me conceited, but I want to tell you now so you should see I do care for the carriage. I am going to give away all the flowers to the people who can see. And you know I like the flowers. But what is the use of them to me? I can't see them. And they ought to go to the people who can. So I am going to give one to every poor person who will have it, till they are all gone. I told Johanna. And they will be able to look at them all day, and enjoy them. I can't. At least, I can enjoy them, but not really. I wanted, at first, to keep my heliotropes, which I planted myself, because of the smell. Perhaps I might keep those, but—but what's the use of keeping those only? I don't think Christ had any flowers of His own that He would have kept. And then I shall be exactly like Christ."

"But, Elias," interposed Hubert, "you need not give your flowers to the poor people. We can buy some for them with your money, and you can distribute them yourself."

Elias shook his head. "And what would become of Volderdoes Zonen then?" he said unexpectedly. "You are forgetting, Hubert, about Volderdoes Zonen."

"There will be money enough left for Volderdoes," replied Hubert, "even if we buy flowers."

"No, there won't," persisted Elias vehemently. "You forget about the kind gentleman's coming and arranging

that it all should be given to the poor. Except what was wanted for Volderdoes Zonen, I said. And Hendrik said so too. There must always be enough for Volderdoes Zonen."

"What do you mean?" queried Hubert. "What kind gentleman?"

But the question was too abrupt. For only answer Elias started to his feet, panic-stricken by sudden reproach, and thinking out aloud, momentarily unconscious of his brother's presence. "I wasn't to tell Hubert!" he cried. "What have I done? Johanna! Johanna! I wanted to be exactly like Christ, and I am always doing something wrong! Oh how dreadful it is to be a fool!"

"Johanna," said Hubert, shutting the door and facing the old woman, "what is this about the Notary coming to see Elias in connection with giving away money to the poor?"

"And if Mynheer has spoken, so much the greater pity, I think, Meneer Hubert," answered the old Nurse with spirit. "I told him to let the matter rest, and so did Meneer Hendrik. For I agree with Meneer Hendrik, and you must excuse my saying so, but I think it a great mistake that the poor gentleman's weak-headedness and kind-heartedness should be abused, and that he should be encouraged to give away everything foolishly to Heaven knows whom."

"You must have mistaken my meaning," said Hubert gently, "or someone must have misinformed you. Let us sit down and talk it over."



## CHAPTER XLI.

### BROTHERS IN UNITY.

"It is true," said little Henky Lossell, stepping out of the cupboard in Thomas's chambers and shaking off as much dust as he could, "I am satisfied. If Lankater says it so decidedly, I am willing to trust him. I say, Tommy, I had no idea his matrimonial affairs were in so bad a mess."

"I could not avoid your overhearing a professional secret, Hendrik," replied Alers pompously. "I do not doubt you will respect it. The whole *mise-en-scène* would have been superfluous, had you trusted your own brother-in-law as much as you appear to trust this henpecked husband, your colleague."

The last word might be explained by the fact that the powerful director of the South Sumatra Tobacco Company was also a Town-Councillor. Hendrik wisely took it that way.

"Humph," he said, preparing to go. "I am trusting you now, at any rate,—to your heart's content, I should think. We must use the money; I have no scruples about that, for the speculation is perfectly safe, and every penny can be paid back in a week or two, if it fail—which it can't. For even were the dividend not to be such an enormous one, the shares would retain their present value, which, high as it seems to be, is not higher than that of other successful tobacco-undertakings. And why, in fact, should all this immense fortune of Elias's remain immovable in the two and a half per cents? Is that to his advantage? I should say No."

"I quite agree with you," replied Alers quietly. "Let him become holder of numerous tobacco-shares for a fortnight or so, and, at the end of that time, you can buy them back from him at cost-price. That is a fair agreement at this moment, when everybody believes they will either remain stationary, or slightly fall. You and I happen to know that they will go up a couple of hundred per cent. And we are treating Elias quite fairly."

"Quite fairly," echoed Hendrik, pausing by the door. "Oh, I am easy enough about that. There's not a man of business but would say the contract was a perfectly fair one. Have you seen Linx already?"

"Yes. He will say nothing definite as yet, but he makes no doubt the deed can be prolonged."

"Really? So much the better. I met him the other day and was half inclined to question him about it."

"Drop that, Hendrik," cried Alers, wheeling round from the window in sudden alarm. "I mean, the less we worry a busy man about the matter, the better. He will let me know as soon as he has looked into the case. You will only irritate him by useless interference."

"All right," said Hendrik, "I sha'n't interfere. But we must have the money in a day or two. Good-bye."

He walked back rapidly towards the Office, in better temper with himself and all the world around him than he had been for many months. Here, at last, was a means of making a great sum of money fairly, and with a minimum of risk—with no risk, really. The shares he was going to buy for Elias were fully worth the price he would pay for them. The unexpected rise was a windfall by which he would profit without in any way injuring his brother. A rise of three hundred on one hundred shares meant a gain of three hundred thousand florins. It would enable him to meet his petroleum-losses.

"And then I shall speculate no more," said Hendrik Lossell. He gave a great gasp of relief.

On the Quay, in front of the big warehouses, the usual hurry and bustle of a week-day morning were at their height. A couple of barges lay moored to the massive posts near the side, half full already of neatly soldered cases, on each of which sat, placidly smiling, the tutelary Chinaman of the house in his many-coloured robes. A strange effect they made, those carefully marshalled rows of gaily-painted Mandarins, side by side, tier above tier, as in some great parliament hall of celestials, vaguely smiling away towards the still, dark water, or upon the loud-voiced labour of the barbarians of the North. You might have fancied that those lines of cunning little peering eyes that turned towards the dim distance of limitless river were gazing with the reposeful dignity of despair in the direction of the yellow shore they would never behold again. One of their number—blue and brilliant, as all—swung high in mid-air from a crane which was slowly lowering him towards his appointed place in a half-completed row. He might have been the speaker of that silent assembly; the gaunt machine was squeaking forth his protests and his appeals. A couple of dozen of his equals sat calmly on a truck by the water-side, awaiting a similar fate.

Fresh truckfuls of Chinamen were being rolled up on the rails. There was a constant rumbling, and creaking and clanking, broken by cries of long-drawn effort and eager command, or by the occasional thud of a heavy case. The master of all passed quickly along the quay and across the wide irregular square. As he went by, the men stood aside from their work and touched their caps. Then they gazed after him for a moment and looked from one to the other in surprise, with a quick jerk of the hand over a hot face, or a careless hitch to a stained blue apron. And a grizzled old man with what had once been a red beard stopped hammering at a cask, and stretched his bent figure slowly, and pensively lifted his eyebrows.

For Hendrik Lossell was whistling a tune. He walked

through the outer office, and the clerks paused in their work, as the warehouse-men had done, and poised their pens half-way above their desks, and exchanged glances.

Hendrik Lossell nodded to a head-clerk without checking his low whistle, and went into his private room and slid the glass-door to behind him.

He threw himself into a big leather arm-chair by the empty grate—the visitor's arm-chair—and drew the morning's paper towards him, still whistling the street-jingle which he had picked up on his road—a merry tune. Everybody was humming it at the time.

And one of the first things he saw in the Commercial Intelligence to which he always turned instinctively was the following telegram from New York:

“Information has accidentally leaked out concerning the plans of a great syndicate which has been stealthily buying up all the petroleum in the market. The immediate result has been a rise of seventy-five cents per cask in the price of petroleum, and a further rise may be confidently expected.”

Hendrik Lossell's lips lengthened themselves out to a protracted whistle of quiet triumph. This was good news indeed. A moment ago he had been rejoicing at the thought of finding himself freed from liabilities; he now suddenly saw himself within touch of the long-coveted wealth. “I shall have a quarter of a million in a few days,” he said, under his breath. “Who knows? Half a million, if petroleum goes up another dollar. I shall buy out Elias yet, in spite of Cornelia. I must get her that sapphire bracelet she has been bothering about. I might buy it to-night when I go home.” He whistled yet louder, as he read over the paragraph again. And then he took up a pencil and made some rapid computations on the newspaper wrapper he had just torn off. They were pleasing

computations, for he smiled over them. He had not smiled over his cipherings for many a day.

Presently Hubert came in. "You are late," said Hendrik, without looking up. Hubert did not answer, but he went to the glass-door and drew the curtain across it. Hendrik dropped his pencil on the blotting-pad in front of him and lifted a pair of astonished eyes to his brother. "What now?" he asked.

Still Hubert did not speak. He came and stood opposite the seat which the head of the firm had now taken by the great central desk. There was only the wide bureau-ministre between them. He folded his arms across his chest and remained watching Hendrik's face. He was thinking—as he had been thinking all the way down to the Office—how best to begin.

"Don't be tragic, Hubert," said Hendrik nervously. "Anything wrong? Cornelia and Margaret been quarrelling again? We must scold them. I will scold—ahem—Margaret. And you can settle with Cornelia."

"There is this wrong," replied Hubert, and his "tragedy-tone" was undeniable. "There is perjury—a broken vow—a violated trust."

"What does he know?" flashed across Hendrik's brain. "All about the tobacco business? Or only that old story of the syndicate?"

"Explain yourself," he said curtly. "If you can speak plainly, at least."

"The plainness of my speech," answered Hubert sternly, "will depend upon the clearness of your memory. Do you remember—or have you forgotten, you, who forget so much?—that night when first we were orphans? It was in this very room that we met, almost at this very spot that we stood, only that the chair you are now occupying was still unoccupied then. My God, was it really unoccupied? Or was I right?"

He paused for a moment. Hendrik laughed angrily.



"You are as superstitious as ever, Hubert," he said. "Things are pardonable in a boy not yet out of his teens which become ridiculous in a middle-aged man of business. Let us get to our work." He spoke hurriedly and turned to his correspondence, but he knew that the move was useless, and that an explanation must come.

"I am not superstitious," replied Hubert quietly, "though it were better to be superstitious than reckless of right and wrong. You remember; let that suffice. And in that solemn hour—it *was* solemn—we swore in the presence of our dead father, in the sight of God, to support the greatness of the old house, and to shield its new chief from hurt."

"And Elias is very comfortable," answered Hendrik, "and has got better horses and finer gardens than you or I. And the business is prospering, in spite of its capital still lying useless in the hands of an idiot. It must be a satisfaction to you to reflect how well you have kept your promise. I cannot say the same for myself, for I have always considered it a foolish and unnecessarily cumbersome one."

"You cannot say the same for yourself," retorted Hubert, "because you have not kept, but broken it."

Hendrik laid down the paper-knife with which he had been toying, sat back in his big round desk-chair, and waited for more.

"How much of Elias's money have you stolen?" asked Hubert, still standing calmly opposite and gazing at his brother with hot, dark eyes. He was one of those few terribly passionate men who remain outwardly calm.

And Hendrik's fault was that he was not capable of deep passion, only of petulant ill-temper.

"You are crazy," he cried hastily. "The climate of China was too hot for you. All Elias's stupid money is there, in a dull heap in the National coffers. You can go and look at it, if you like. I have been slaving away my whole life to augment it. I wish you had stayed out yon-



der, Hubert, instead of coming back to make a fool of yourself here."

"I can understand the wish," said Hubert. "I do not share it. My only regret, and my deepest self-reproach, is that I did not return at once, when I first felt the impulse to do so. Tell me. How much is it, Hendrik? Things cannot remain like this! It were best for you to confess of your own free will."

There was a quiet menace in his tone which frightened Hendrik.

"Are you going to call in the police," asked the latter, "and give me in charge?"

"No," said Hubert. "It is a matter between you and me and—him." He jerked his head in the direction of a portrait of their father, which he had suspended over his desk by the window. Hendrik disapproved of such sentimentalities, but decency had forbidden him to object. For some of his father's old employés were mightily pleased with the portrait. Hendrik Junior's present scorpions had taught them to think very kindly of Hendrik Senior's long-departed whips.

"You do wisely," said Hendrik bitterly, "for all the police would find to do here would be to arrest you for slandering your brother. Tell me what you accuse me of, and I will answer you, not before."

"I accuse you," replied Hubert, "of having taken part of Elias's already invested capital, and used it for your own purposes. To render such a step necessary, you must first have appropriated the large balance of his uninvested annual revenues. How great the deficit is I cannot say, but it must be very considerable. And therefore, not knowing, I ask you: How much of Elias's money have you stolen?"

"I have not stolen a penny," cried Hendrik vehemently. "I tell you it is not true. The money is all there; only some of it is invested differently. For Heaven's sake, give up your grand tragedy airs, and let us talk sense. It is a

shame of you, Hubert, to accuse me thus disgracefully. You have no right to, and our father, who was a just man, would have been angry with you for doing it. You are most unjust to me. I have thrown away my whole life for the sake of your fancies, and now you treat me like this! I am worried to death, what with you, and Cornelia, and everything!"

It was too bad to find all this new annoyance cropping up just as his troubles seemed sinking to rest. The tears of aggravation sprang into his impatient little eyes.

Unintentionally he had chosen the best way of disarming his impressionable brother.

"Let us understand each other," said Hubert. "That is all I ask for. Tell me, to begin with, why you brought the Notary to Elias and drew up a deed which enabled you to get at the invested capital." He left the magisterial attitude which he had retained till now, and came and sat down by Hendrik.

At this moment Hendrik was feeling helpless, utterly "demoralized," anxious only for rest and good-will. The sudden relaxation of the strain under which he had been living left him powerless, for the time being, to take up the struggle again. Everything was coming right at last, at last. If only they would give him breathing-room for a few days more.

Looking straight in front of him, down at the figures on the blotting-pad, he hurriedly told his brother the story of the Transvaal syndicate, how Alers had induced him to guarantee the issue, how the subscription had failed, and how he had been obliged to take up the shares. "Had I acted dishonestly with regard to Elias's revenues, as you imagine," he added, "I should not have required to take any of his capital, but, as it happened, the balance of his half-year's income had just been properly invested a few weeks earlier. Since then the sum taken off has been gradually paid in again by accumulation of interest. As I told

you, Elias's whole lumber of money lies there, and much good may it do both him and us."

"It is all there," repeated Hubert thoughtfully, "except eighty-four thousand florins, which are missing."

"Which are invested in Gold Shares. The shares may be worth a fortune any day."

"Why did you not take up those shares yourself, Hendrik, either at the time, or afterwards?"

"I? How can I? Look at the way in which Cornelia lives! Compare it to your own!"

"I have four children. Do not lie to me, Hendrik, not now. Cornelia wastes what she can, but she does not waste your whole income. You have been buying out Elias as fast as you could buy."

"A snail could not go faster," said Hendrik doggedly. "Oh, I am a rich man, I, and a happy one. And now, as I have told you everything, apologise and leave me in peace."

"It is really everything?" queried Hubert anxiously.

"Go to the devil!" screamed Hendrik. "Or rather, go to the 'Great Book' in Amsterdam and find out for yourself. Mind you go to-day, for next week I shall probably steal it all. You can reckon out how much more there is than before you started for China. And, once more, I wish you had stayed there."

Hubert bent forward and put his hand on Hendrik's knee. "Dear brother," he said, "do not let us quarrel. I confess that I came here with evil thoughts against you in my heart. I knew you had deceived Elias about his charities. I believed you had misappropriated his money. I wronged you to a large extent, and you must forgive me. Still there remains this business of the gold-shares. They are practically worth nothing. That money must be refunded somehow."

"It must," said Hendrik. "Elias would miss it."

"It is the trust, the trust!" cried Hubert passionately. "Don't you see it is as hard for me, with my increasing

family, as it can possibly be for you? I do not deny the seeming cruelty of the facts, but can we alter them? Can we help it that Elias is rich and weak-headed, and that we have the brains and are poor?"

"Not I," said Hendrik significantly. "You, perhaps, had better not talk too much about altering or helping."

Hubert started back, as if stung. "I know it," he said softly. "Do you think I ever forget it? And therefore, so help me God! I will remain faithful to him against you, against myself."

They were both silent, each occupied with his own gloomy thoughts. Then said Hubert: "But, if Elias were well and strong, that would bring you no advantage. Rather the reverse. You always forget, Hendrik, that we are his step-brothers. The money is Volderdoes money. It would always have been his. It is his by right. We cannot take it away from him. What, after all, would you call 'justice'? That we, who would not have had a penny of it, had he been in his right mind, should now kill him, or take it away from him, because he is half-insane?"

"Had he been as other men," cried Hendrik hotly, "he would have taken his own course, and we ours. At least, there would not have been this hourly torment of Tantalus! Who am I that I should be tied down to slave away all my strength for him?"

"Would you have preferred not to have any connection with Volderdoes Zonen at all?"

"No. Volderdoes Zonen is ours."

"Volderdoes Zonen is Elias. We are turning in a circle, Hendrik, by talking in this manner. This money for the shares must be restored. Will you restore it?"

"I can't," replied Hendrik sullenly. "He has the shares."

"If you cannot," said Hubert thoughtfully, "I must. Do you wish that?"

"No."

"There is no other alternative. And yet it seems unfair to my wife and children. Listen to me, Hendrik. You know how I have worked out in China—life was expensive there—you know how simply we live here. You know how few shares I have bought. I pay a very large yearly premium on a policy of life-insurance. I thought that was wiser, especially out there. But my wife brought me sixty thousand florins as her marriage-portion. The rest I can provide. We will lend you that money, Hendrik, if you really haven't got it yourself. You and I must not remain in Elias's debt. I am sure my wife will be willing. We can take the shares, such as they are, and you must buy them back from us."

Suddenly the whole difference of their lives stood out before Hendrik. Himself and Hubert. Cornelia and Margaret. The simple parlour, noisy with uproarious children, and his great reception-rooms, dismal with music and dancing beneath a hundred glaring lights. In an eager impulse of sympathy he held out both hands to his brother.

"No, no," he said. "Not that. Sooner than that I could sell you some of my shares in the business, if Margaret will have them. But I trust it will not be necessary. You must give me a few days to look the whole matter over. At the end of that time, we will go into this business of Elias's fortune together. It is true, as you say, that it is his, and his only, and we cannot do otherwise than accumulate it. But circumstances *are* hard on me—on us; you must admit that."

"They are," said Hubert, warmly returning the pressure of the other's hand. "Let us not make them worse by dissension. Oh, Hendrik, when I came down to the Office just now, I—I——" his voice faltered. "Do not let us speak of it," he went on hastily. "I am afraid I am self-righteous. The strain is too great. We must end it, as you say. Dear brother, we must put ourselves out of the way of temptation."



"We cannot," said Hendrik.

"Yes, we can. We should have done it at once. I have often thought that out at Shanghai. And the experiences of these last twenty-four hours have brought home the conviction to me more irresistibly than ever. We must remove all that is irregular in our position. We must lodge an application for Elias to be declared legally insane."

"A curatorship!" cried Hendrik. In his utter weariness the idea seemed almost fraught with relief. The rise in petroleum would soon enable him to free such stock of Elias's as he had given in trust. On that very account he had not even mentioned the matter. And the transaction in Sumatra shares would help to buy out the nominal head of the tea-business to a certain extent. He must be content with what he could get. Anything for peace of conscience, peace with Cornelia, peace with Hubert. This harassing struggle after the unattainable must end. He felt his hands loosening round the rope, on which he had climbed till now towards the goal of his life. In a day or two he would be half-way. He must be content with that. Content.

"A curatorship," he repeated. "Perhaps it would be best. In that case, Hubert, you eternalize the status quo. Neither you nor I, as long as Elias lives, can ever buy share of his again."

"I know," replied Hubert. "It is bad, but it is better than hanging thus on the brink of a moral precipice. Doubtless some member of his mother's family will be appointed co-trustee."

"Let it be so," said Hendrik resignedly. "Only do not hurry me. We have plenty of time. After all, it is true that he is crazy. He has always been crazy. Don't do anything for the moment. Let us weigh well each step that we take."

"These things are not done in a day," said Hubert, "nor in a week. I must speak to the Notary at once."

"Wait," repeated Hendrik, "wait for a day or two. I



agree with you that this must end. We cannot have such another scene as we have gone through this morning. I am quite willing to arrange everything. Surely you approve of my having prevented Elias from throwing all he possessed to the four winds of charity. Was I to sell the business, or establish a hospital in the warehouses?"

"No," answered Hubert. "I suppose you did right. And yet I wish it had not been necessary to deceive him so cruelly. That proves how false is the situation we have created for ourselves, and how imperative it is that we should escape from it. At any cost."

"At any cost," said Hendrik.

And once more they shook hands on their agreement. To Hubert it seemed like a renewal of that solemn covenant, made many years ago, on the same spot, to protect Elias and to maintain the greatness of the great house of Volderdoes. He looked into Hendrik's eyes, and his heart was humbled by the recognition of his own hardness and solemnized by thoughts of his dead father and of the half-brother to whom life was barely alive.

And to Hendrik the moment brought a compromise with his conscience, a bargain for peace at half-price. He was not ill-content. He smiled back to Hubert. And from his place over the mantelpiece, immovable, placidly, pleasantly humorous, with the eternal leer of commercial cunning on his smug face and in his little slit eyes, the patron of the family, and the business, and of all the greatness of the great house, the lord of the tea-chests and the money-bags, smiled down upon the two brothers, and their concord, and their righteousness, and their good-will.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### BLIND JUSTICE.

THE "Pups" were romping, as it seems that only pups, whether four or two-footed, have the power and the pleasure to do. There were four Pups, so their father would have told you, in various degrees of beautiful lessness, each naughtier and noisier than the one overhead. And sweeter. No, not sweeter, when you came to remember how very sweet the other was. They were all sweeter than each other in a perfect circle of superlative comparison, delightfully illogical, appreciably true. The ball of a parent's affection rolls so swiftly and continuously in such a home-circle as this that he never has time to realize how the solid girdle is but a unit in ceaseless motion. It is an optical illusion of the heart.

As for sweetness, don't let's talk of it in connection with other people's children. Each leper, says the bachelor, likes his own sores best. And "I didn't come to look at your pictures," thinks the artist, "unless it be to compare them to mine." Each parent is a poet, and his child is his poem. Few people—even poets—care to read other people's poetry. Especially poets.

A truth is no less a truth because stated ungrammatically. On the contrary, imperfect utterance is of the very essence of truth.

The sweetness of Hubert Lossell's children, therefore, must be accepted on the unsupported testimony of Hubert Lossell alone. If Cornelia be called as a witness, I object.

The middle-aged man next door, who wrote for the Press—and in the press—was quite sure about the naughtiness and the noise.

These Lossells did not live “detached,” you see. Not even semi-detached. They had selected a residence in one of those new streets which have sprung up of late years in hundreds round all Dutch cities, streets constructed on a system both sociable and economical, which enables several families (for instance) to combine in buying the same copy of an evening paper and to arrange that its contents shall be read aloud in the sitting-room of the centre house with the neighbours comfortably listening, each in his own. The style of building has other advantages. It renders all the talking from door to door and questioning of servant-maids superfluous. When Number 19 hears Number 17 sneeze, she need not even ring to ask Betje whether that heartless dentist still persists in dragging out his poor little delicate wife night after night. And, besides, rents being high, the jerry-builder can build a better house for himself. So that all comes right in the end.

In no civilized country does the jerry-builder rule supreme as in this land of damp. The Dutch are too accustomed to damp to be afraid of it. Its graceful designs, they think—often as artistic as King Frost’s—improve the look of the very cheap gray wall-paper the landlord has provided, and the wretched, half-painted, white doors are none the worse for a little Italian curling and cracking. Damp is inevitable, as death, and therefore we may as well all die of malaria in our childhood. Some of us don’t, alas!—but grow up rickety, to beget rickety children. And it is so funny to see those dear little frogs come skipping over the carpet, or to discover that Baby has eaten all the pretty toadstools which grew in that corner by the store-cupboard.

If you happen to have a couple of soiled packs of cards lying about, and a box or two of lucifer matches, you can

start for Holland and set up business as a builder. The insurance companies will not insist on your using Bryant and May's. They can hardly be over-particular, and, besides, the damp is bound to take the fizzle out of everything in a day or two.

All evils have their compensations here below. In the lease of some of these Dutch houses a clause has been introduced which expressly stipulates that there shall be no dancing and—no piano. In Germany, where the buildings are massive as a rule, such clauses are unknown, and the people live in flats!

"All this may be very funny," you say, "but it has nothing to do with the subject. The subject, as I understood it, was originally Pups, not Kennels." Nay, gentle reader, be not impatient, like the much-pressed gentleman next-door; all of it is connected, somehow or other, propping and propped, even as the houses in the street. And as to what you have just been reading, whether you liked it or not, I must beg to disclaim all responsibility in connection with it. It is all out of an article that unfortunate journalist was writing, and he naturally felt sore and spiteful on the house-question, for the Dutch style of building materially affected his own top story, besides reducing the circulation of his paper by two-thirds. He had every reason to cry out—like a voice in a wilderness of bricks—for thicker walls. He cried out—internally—and the little Lossells answered, audibly: Yah.

"Yah, yah, yah," screamed the little Lossells, running to and fro, and kicking their toes out at everything kickable. The third child, Judy—shade of stately Judith Lossell!—was playing at hiding herself—à la mode d'Autruche—by pressing a pair of chubby hands tightly against her eyes and calling to her elder brother and sister to look for her. From his throne on mother's lap Hubbie, the babyest of the babies, clapped his hands and crowed—as well he might, the little cock of the walk.

A cock has a fine nose. Hubbie's would be put out of joint in a couple of months.

"What a fine baby it is," said Hubert. "Do you know, Mag, I think he is prettier than the others were at his age."

Margaret laughed. "You say that of them all," she answered. "At least, you said it of Judy."

"But not of Winifred," protested Hubert in self-defence.

Margaret laughed again. "No, you *could* hardly have said it of Winnie," she replied. "Poor Winnie! she was certainly not a beauty at her birth. Do you remember old Mr. Topham, of the Consulate: 'But, Madam, the child is not really so ugly as I was given to understand'? That was a pretty speech to make to a mother, and very kindly meant." She tossed up Hubbie in her merriment at the recollection, and that young gentleman stretched out his hands in mid-air towards the other three mites rolling higgledy-piggledy on the floor.

"But she has vastly improved," said Hubert, whom the story rendered slightly huffy even now. "She is quite as nice-looking as the other little girls one sees."

"Handsome is as handsome does," declared Margaret, setting down the struggling baby, who at once rolled away and joined the rest.

"It is the other way in the world," said Hubert.

"Hubert, I wish you would not say such things. You do not mean them. To hear you talk one would think you did not believe in goodness at all."

"I don't. 'Miserable sinners.' Is that not what you say every Sunday? Do you mean the words, or do you not?"

"I mean them," she answered solemnly. "And every Sunday I say: 'Lord, have mercy upon us,' and I mean those words too."

"Then we are at one," he said lightly. The flippancy



of his tone jarred upon her ear. "Wherever I turn I see miserable sinners, as where would they not be when you find them in church? They are not good, my sinners. Are yours? No, I do not believe in human goodness. In effort, perhaps, as long as it is not too exhausting. But we never allow Virtue to approach too near us, for we can't stand her treading on our corns."

"Is our effort to succeed single-handed?" began Margaret.

"No religion, I entreat of you! You know, Mag, I bargained for Sundays only, and an extra day in Leap Year!" He broke away from her and ran to pick up the baby, which had somehow fallen on one side and could not right itself. But, a moment after, he came back to her. "No," he said hurriedly, speaking with much feeling, "I do not believe in goodness, not even with you as an example. We are only bad and worse. And so we must not be angry with the worst. I believe in human justice, sometimes, when a man is found wise and strong enough to dispense it. Not in Divine Justice. Ah, not in that. Look at Elias. God is dead. Only the world has not got accustomed to the idea yet, and some of us—I myself—go on crying to Him, and perhaps loving Him, as we do with our own human lost ones. I believe in living straight. Straight on in the darkness. That is always best, and what else can we do? And I believe in Destiny"—"Don't, Jack!" cried Margaret, in mingled anguish and anxiety of soul, to her eldest, who was climbing up to the lamp—"in blind, inexorable Fate. Let us go straight, whatever the goal. There is no goal; there are no sign-posts. Our feet are ours. That is all we know. And the road? The road is God's, say you. It is Fate's, say I. What does it matter? The end is the same. The end is wickedness, cruelty, injustice—theft, murder, destitution. And the cry of the innocent and the helpless strikes cold against a smiling heaven."



He turned and left her, without another look at her, or at the children, who, astonished by this abrupt departure, followed him out into the passage, en troupe, clamouring for a "Good-night" from papa.

Margaret rose slowly and sorrowfully to bring them back. "Poor Hubert!" she said to herself. "It is this business with Hendrik. That is troubling him very much. I wish we could have stayed out at Shanghai. But I suppose it was right to come here." She prepared to go after her offspring, when a scream from outside caused her to hasten her steps.

The children were huddled up in a bunch under the gas-lamp, half-way down the long, narrow hall by the stairs. Winifred—the poor little creature with the outlandish name and plain features—was vigorously scolding John James. John James was looking guilty. And Judy was howling as if a whole Atlantic Ocean of pain and indignation were tossing in her tiny breast. She was vainly endeavouring to utilize her two hands—having only two—in three places at once, and to rub both her eyes and the back of her head. And the discovery of the difficulties inseparable from such a struggle augmented her feeling of injury, and, consequently, the tempest of sorrow in her soul. She was only three years old, but she already agreed with her father, that life strikes more sores than man has powers of healing.

Furthermore, John James had hold of Hubbie by his skirts.

Thus Human Order, in the form of the *Mater Familias*, came upon them and arraigned them before Human Justice in the form of the *Mater Familias* again.

The part of Justice, assisted by delation, was not an arduous one. Little Winifred—sharp-faced, sharp-voiced, sharp-witted—was eager to tell how Jack had pushed past Judy in the chase after their retreating father, and had knocked up against her and sent her flying against the

linen-press. "Yes, and he bum-bum-bumbled me," explained Judy between her howls—a confusion of "bump" and "tumble." Jack looked sorrow and shame-struck. But he still clung to the protesting Hubbie's long-drawn skirts.

It was too bad. The little sufferer had a big bruise on her small head, a bruise bad enough to warrant arnica, and self-righteousness and all the interest of invalidism. Domestic Justice felt that her task in this case was easy. Judy's head must be covered with a bandage and Jack's with reproach. How often had she not told him to be more careful with his poor little sisters! A great, rough boy, that was not fit to play with little girls. It was the older child that should look after the younger, instead of which, if they hurt themselves, it was almost always through Jack. He was very naughty.

"Am I not perpetually repeating to you, Jack, that you should be careful with the little ones?"

"Yes, Mammie," said Jack, ruefully watching the bathing of Judy's head. Judy's yells had subsided into a tearful pucker of reproach.

Well, if he would not listen to her, he must be punished. He could have no sugar in his porridge to-night. There is a right and wrong in this world, after all, whatever Hubert's despairing idealism may say, and responsible Justice must clearly distinguish them. And a child must be trained up from his youth in the way he should go. The compromise of the parents paves most men's way to hell. She watched her eldest as he slowly ate his unsweetened porridge, she watched him with inexorable face. It was very painful, most painful to her (parents like to think that, especially when they beat their children), but it was unavoidable. "There is nothing cruel," she said to herself, "in this world, except sin."

And the beauty of leading these infant minds in the right path once more impressed itself upon her. She often

allowed her thoughts to dwell upon it, as she sat at her quiet needle-work. It was the joy and the duty of her life. She would think also, doubtless—prayerfully—of the responsibility; but she liked to think of the beauty best.

And to-night her thoughts lingered round Elias, that new-found child, away in his lonely home with his nurse and his canaries, and round the little one soon to be sent to complete a circle which never seemed incomplete till next time. She sat fondly watching the whole troop of them, intent on their supper, scooping vigorously in their already empty bowls, Winifred quick, impatient and neat, Judy with a big knot and a pair of donkey's ears sticking out on the top of her head. Jack stopped scooping first.

Supper precedes bed with most children—alas, that it should not be so with all! Jack slept in his parent's room; the other three were in the night-nursery with their nurse. The young gentleman found himself marched off in disgrace by his mother, and it was not till he had been tucked in, kissless because unrepentant, that he opened his mouth and spake:

“Mammie, I want to tell you something.”

“What is it, Jack?”

“I didn't knock over Judy on purpose.”

“Perhaps not. But you should have been more careful. I have often told you so.”

“No, but I mean I really couldn't help it. It was Hubbie. He crawled after Papa. And he was quite near the stairs already. And I remembered what you had said about looking after them. And I just caught him as he was going to tumble. And I fell, Mammie. I did, really, 'cause I was in such a hurry. He was on the stairs, you see. I mean at the top. And I knocked over Judy, 'cause she got in the way.”

Margaret was silent.

“And I hurt myself,” said Jack meekly. “A little.”

He pulled up his nightgown and discovered a blue bruise over his knee.

"Why did you not say so at once?" asked his mother, a little crossly.

"'Cause I didn't want to bother about Winnie."

As Margaret went slowly downstairs, she pondered the beauty and the responsibility of it all. But the responsibility lay topmost in her mind.

She wondered whether she would find her husband waiting for her in the drawing-room. It was his almost invariable custom to come in to tea after the children had been stowed away for the day. They would often read together for an hour or so, alternately choosing the book. Their choice was very dissimilar. Hubert had last pitched on Bulwer's "Eugene Aram," and now they were reading Margaret's selection: "Kingsley's Life and Letters."

Hubert was a stay-at-home, solitary man. He abhorred all festive gatherings and theatrical or musical entertainments. He abhorred even the sociable privacy of a club. He was always uncomfortable under amusement of any kind.

He was waiting for her now, calmly, as if nothing had happened, with the book open before him. She saw that he wished her to ignore his outburst, and so she went over quietly to her tea-table and sat down.

They had left off at Chapter XI. the evening before. He read on tranquilly in the hush of the softly lighted room to the occasional click of her movements among the cups and saucers.

And presently he came to that bit about "the taking away of human life" in one of the letters to Thomas Cooper, the Chartist: "After much thought, I have come to the conclusion that you cannot take away *human* life. That *animal* life is all you take away; and that very often the best thing you can do for a poor creature is to put him out of this world, saying, 'You are evidently unable to get on here. We render you back into God's hands that He

may judge you, and set you to work again somewhere else, giving you a fresh chance as you have spoilt this one.'"

He laid down the book. The hero it describes with his passionate, life-absorbing, life-expanding love of earth and heaven, of God and man, of body and soul, he could not rightly appreciate, as all will understand who knew them both. His was a very different view of existence. He had read for his wife's pleasure, untouched in his heart.

"That is strikingly put," he said thoughtfully, "very strikingly put."

And then before Margaret could make any remark, he took up the volume again and read on.

"Wait a minute, Hubert," she said, interrupting him. "Will you have another cup of tea?"

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### DOOMED.

"It will all come right in a day or two," Hendrik Lossell repeated to himself, as he walked home from the Office. He, too, had a home to return to of evenings. Most of us fortunately have. But few of us have as handsome and as well-appointed and well-ordered and well-governed a home as Hendrik Lossell had.

A home like that gives a man a social position in the city of his in-dwelling. The people who enter it respect the owner, and the people who pass by it, unable to enter, respect the owner even more. Cornelia had refurnished the greater part of it, and the tradesmen of Koopstad had understood that her husband ought to represent them in the Town Council. And, when the new settees and "causeses" were spread out in all their silken glory, Cornelia invited her friends and her friends' friends to come and sit on them, and they came, and told each other that "Cornelia is my cousin, you know," and that a woman with her complexion should never have chosen cucumber-green, and that, furthermore, Hendrik Lossell ought to be a good anti-Radical candidate for the Town Council. They would certainly not have told each other this last item had Cornelia not cunningly prompted them, for many of them had only the very vaguest idea what the Town Council was. But their husbands and fathers knew well enough, and these gentlemen told each other—in Cornelia's new Turkish "fumoir," over her husband's "company" cigars—that



Hendrik Lossell ought to represent Law and Order—orderly Progress and lawful Innovation—in the Town Council of Koopstad. And so Hendrik presented himself as a candidate. He told the electors that, if he was not elected this time, he would re-present himself. If he was elected, he would represent Koopstad. But that was one of those innocent illusions which nobody believed in. He was elected; Cornelia took to her bed and rested for four days after his election, then she had to get up to attend a ball; and he made a very good Town Councillor, young as he was, and he felt very “Right Worshipful” indeed, and nobody could ever prove that he stole anything from anybody.

“It will come all right,” repeated the Town Councillor, as he turned his steps in the direction of home. That was his one engrossing thought. It would all come right if only they would give him time. It was most provoking, undoubtedly, that Hubert should have chosen this very day to cut up unpleasant and spoil his brother’s good temper. Just as the tide—the petroleum tide—seemed turning with a sudden sweep in the right direction. Just as the much tormented one had obtained the certainty that the tradeswinds of tobacco were wafting him onwards towards his long-coveted goal. It was bad, but it might have been so much worse. There is always a source of persistent satisfaction for the human heart in that consideration, if only the “worseness,” be very near and very plain. As it was. For ever since Hubert’s return, Hendrik had been dreading an explanation. He had shut Johanna’s lips by reminding her how the more generous, more impulsive brother had always insisted upon every gratification of the “innocent’s” whims, so that it was very probable he would consent to Elias’s self-impoverishment, if Elias declared he could never be happy, unless poor. Johanna in no way desired to see her darling brought to destitution. “It is true,” she said hesitatingly, “that Meneer Hubert is always very indulgent

to Myn Heer." "He is too indulgent," answered Hendrik. "He can deny him nothing. It is his way of making atonement for—for his misfortune." The old nurse felt that there was much truth in this. They were very comfortable, as it was; Elias could obtain everything he required or desired, and his money was safe in the hands of a good man of business, who would take excellent care of it, being one of his heirs. Johanna had no reason, and no right, to molest Hubert on the subject. She liked neither of the brothers. She would have preferred the younger twin; only she could never quite make up her mind to forget that early flower-pot. She pictured it to herself: the crash, and her beautiful pet on the ground, and the well-known balcony, and Hubbie leaning over it, with the vague smile of wonder and amusement on his childish face. He had it still.

As for Elias, it was not difficult to make him understand that he must not bother Hubert about "the Charity." It sufficed to tell him that Hubert would be unhappy if he knew about it. And so Elias remembered. Until he forgot. He would have forgotten sooner but that he was less occupied of late with the poor people in his Homes. The arrival of his brother with a wife and children, and all the new avenues of interest which that event inevitably forced open in his blocked brain, gave him more food for thought than he could properly digest. He did not lose sight (if that expression be permissible) of his little group of pauper friends, but they sank into the background in those moments when Margaret and her children absorbed his attention. No wonder they absorbed it. Margaret was a revelation to Elias.

"I wish the stupid fellow could have kept silence a week longer," said Hendrik to himself. Of course he wished that. He wished that Hubert had remained out at Shanghai, and had done all he could to keep him there. Yet not because of any definite accusation he brought against himself as if he had done the blind man positive wrong. He

did not think so. As for the South African imbroglio, that had been unintentional, and really, after all, what did it matter to Elias how some of his vast wealth was invested? As for the using of some of that wealth in the form of security—only security, mind you—well! That was business. Elias was none the poorer because his stock lay at a money-lender's. If Hubert had only been more reasonable and less romantic, a better man of business, in a word, the twin-brothers could have worked together and built up their own fortune instead of quarrelling and distrusting each other and seeking for allies, the one in an idiot, the other in a knave. From day to day Hendrik had expected Hubert's discovery, but also from day to day he had expected that a rise in his "ventures" would enable him to contest it. "Missing money? There is no money missing!" And now, after all, it had come a fortnight too soon.

Yet how much worse matters would have looked had it come yesterday! There was inexpressible comfort in that. Never would Hendrik have believed that he could have received the proposal to demand a curatorship with such relative equanimity as he was now able to show. Yesterday only the thought would have maddened him, driven him to some deed of desperation, for Hubert's plan, if it succeeded, destroyed all the hopes of Hendrik's life at a blow. But now he only felt that the nearness of the approaching end must stimulate him to fiercer effort. He must "borrow" from Elias, by Alers's help, twice as much money as he had originally intended. It was merely borrowing on perfect security. He would pay Elias four per cent. for the loan. Yes, that would be best, and fairest. His face brightened again wonderfully. Petroleum was going up. And the South Sumatra Company was in a splendid condition. It was on the point—most undoubtedly—of paying a dividend of fifty-five per cent. The opportunity was an altogether unusual one. He must take double, treble the amount.

And he would pay interest for a week's loan at the rate

of four and a half per cent., a high rate, when you considered how exceptional the security was.

And when Hubert came—as he was coming—with his insulting doubts and fears, and brought the Notary and the doctors and the family council and the magistrates to consult about the administration of the property of the richest man in Koopstad, then Hendrik would face him and say calmly: “A curatorship? Why not? Yes, I think it would be better, for the poor creature is of course utterly incompetent, and I shall be glad of any arrangement by which the responsibility is divided. Practically I have acted as sole trustee ever since my father’s death, gentlemen. You will find, Hubert, that, with the exception of the yearly expenditure we fixed on, and a certain sum which has been annually devoted to charity of late by the owner’s especial desire, all the revenues have been duly capitalized at regular intervals of three months.”

And then he would add:

“Before the final settlement be come to, I should wish to suggest that my brother and I purchase, at the proper valuation, as large a share in the business as each of us is able or willing to take.”

And then, when Hubert was silent:

“I will take——” How much?

There lay the rub. The answer would depend on his gains in the next few days. And to gain much one must risk more. Fortunately he now had the opportunity. Hubert was pressing him forward. He must gain immensely, risk immensely, well, not “risk.” There was no real risk, since he had heard Lankater that morning, from Thomas’s cupboard.

He must be able to say:

“I will take all.”

And then would come rest at last. Blessed, peaceful rest. No more friction, no more anxiety, no more intrigue

and untruth. As for the money, he did not want the money. There was far too much of it already. Hubert's children—and it looked as if there were going to be a whole menagerie of them—would have money enough in any case, without a big inheritance from their uncle Hendrik. But at last he would assume his right position in Koopstad as head of the great house of Volderdoes. And Hubert would be nowhere in comparison. In time he might become President of the Chamber of Commerce, as old Elias had been. His heart swelled with triumph merely at the hope.

And Cornelia might do what she liked henceforth. Live as she wished to, spend what she thought fit. That, more than anything, would contribute to the peace he was longing for. He had always had a very friendly feeling for Cornelia. She was not half bad, if you only allowed her to have her own way. There would be no further reason now, once his end was obtained, for thwarting her.

No, the sooner he made up with Cornelia the better. He would look in at the jeweller's at once and get her that bracelet.

He turned down a side-street, towards the busy part of the town, where the big shops are. He walked with brisk, elastic step along the rough little yellow brick pavement. The removal of the weight of suspense and discomfort from his shoulders made him feel ten years younger already. Not ten years younger than he was, but ten years younger than he had felt. He was sometimes surprised to realize how young he still was in years. He had always felt much older than Hubert.

As he went along the street, almost everyone saluted him in infinitely varied angles of deference. The people who were not entitled to take off their hats to the Town Councillor, pretended to look as if they would have been able to do so, had they seen him.

He went into the jeweller's and got Cornelia's coveted bracelet. He could not help pulling a face over the price,



but he said nothing. As he was leaving the shop, with the treasure securely hidden in an inner pocket (even in that good old-fashioned city, where thieves punishable by law are almost unknown), he noticed his own carriage in the distance running away towards home as fast as its pair of thoroughbreds could make it. He recognised Chris, his coachman, on the box. Cornelia had evidently been out late, probably shopping. He frowned, in spite of all his bright resolves to restore the harmony of his existence, in spite of the peace-offering, lying in a lump against his breast.

For, ever since their last "explanation," Cornelia, it cannot be denied, had made herself very disagreeable. It was as if she had set herself to show her husband that she intended to keep her word, and reward his lack of confidence by spending as much as she chose. She was constantly parading her expenditure before him in a quiet, unostentatious, peculiarly aggravating manner. Costly toys and trifles appeared here and there on tables and whatnots, and the lady's toilet became, not richer—Cornelia knew better—but even more frequently varied than before. She was making debts, intentionally. She was keeping her word to the effect that she would keep her word no longer than necessary. To the man of business in a city of business men, this idea, in all its limitless uncertainty, was incessantly harassing. He sought some small comfort in the fact that even her indiscretions had their discreteness. They were studied indiscretions. She would always remain a good housewife, a woman with a cool head and a firm hold on herself. She had not bought the bracelet, for instance, much as she wanted it.

He could understand and make allowance for her annoyance to a certain extent. She had reasoned it out to him so clearly, and, undeniably, there was something in it. Perhaps he had treated her unkindly sometimes, and unjustly. He could not help himself. Hitherto circumstances



had been very much against him. Destiny? What nonsense Hubert talked about Destiny! A man's destiny is almost always to be miserable, and his mission is to overcome it. With all the clamorous weakness of his fretfulness he rebelled against Fate.

Henceforth, he must make larger allowance for Cornelia's likes and dislikes. He smiled over the word "allowance," as it came up in his mind; it seemed such a remarkably suitable one. And, an hour later, as he passed the open dining-room door, with the costly parcel in his hand, he stopped suddenly, full of this new impulse of kindness, and slipped into the room and popped his present under her napkin on the waiting dinner-table, as if he were a school-boy or a bashful lover, or anything else but Cornelia Lossell's lord.

He went into the drawing-room then, empty-handed. Cornelia was standing by the window, intently scrutinizing a little ivory statuette. She continued looking at it for a second or two, after he was well within the door, and then she gently put it down on an *étagère* by her side. He saw, at a glance, that the little doll was a new acquisition, procured, probably, from the Jew antiquary near the Market Place, who never has anything in his shop that is not valuable, and never sells anything till he has made it considerably more valuable still—to the purchaser. Hendrik's first sensation was one of good-humoured surprise at her childishness. How could a woman of Cornelia's strength of mind be so childish? He forgot that every woman—even though she be a Lucretia Borgia, or a Lucretia, wife of Colatinus—has this element in her, the cat-like instinct of teasing. Then he cast a side-glance at the figure. It was a Cupid. A Cupid, of all creatures, on such an errand as this! He accepted the circumstance as an omen of good.

"It is much warmer than it has been," said Cornelia.

"Spring," answered Hendrik. He almost wished he

had brought the bracelet with him at once. It would have been much more reasonable.

"I see the new 'Greffier' \* and his wife have called," said Cornelia.

"They lose no time," replied Hendrik.

"Few people do where we are concerned," said Cornelia, with subdued satisfaction.

Hendrik did not answer. The fact was true. He was very glad it was true.

"That comes of entertaining as we do," added Cornelia.

"Yes," said Hendrik meekly. And then they went in to dinner.

He felt uncomfortable and foolish as he took his seat. After all, Cornelia was not a woman to be tenderly playful with. She would probably smother her appreciation of the present in contempt of the harmless little joke. And he had forgotten that the man would be there, watching them immovably from the side-board with calmly contemplative eyes.

Cornelia drew her napkin towards her, and, as she did so, the parcel within rolled away, with a bump, across the floor. This was the first misfortune, Hendrik felt with a guilty start. The butler had to go and pick it up and hand it to his mistress. She looked inquiringly, coldly, across at her husband. Hendrik grew hot, and blushed a childish blush over his sallow complexion.

"Attendons qu'il soit parti," said Cornelia. And they commenced eating their soup in silence accordingly. But half-way in the process she laid down her spoon. "Au fond, pourquoi?" she said. And she took up the parcel from beside her plate, and opened it, and peeped inside. Mulder also attempted, discreetly, to peep with her. But she was too quick for him.

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\* A legal functionary.

She put back the little case on the table without a word. Hendrik sat watching her anxiously. It was her turn now, he noticed, to flush. She sat with eyes downcast upon her folded hands. He could not see her expression.

When the seryant had departed with the soup-tureen, she got up slowly and came round to where her husband sat, and passed behind him and carefully locked the door. For such was the nature of the woman.

And then she came back to him and knelt down beside his chair. She forgot for the moment that it is not wise to kneel down beside your husband, when you are older than he is and majestic and have a Roman nose. She threw her arm round his neck, and he, looking suddenly into her face, a little beneath the level of his own, saw, to his amazement, that her eyes were full of tears.

"Hendrik," she said, "you are the better one of us two. We both have very bad tempers, but, at least, you sometimes conquer yours."

After that, Hendrik's peace of mind was not even seriously disturbed by a brief note from his brother Hubert which they brought him just as he and Cornelia rose from table:

"DEAR H. : I have been thinking about our talk of this morning, and it appears to me that we had better not put off longer than necessary. The preliminaries take so long as it is. I shall go and see Dr. Pillenaar to-morrow before coming to the Office and talk the whole matter over with him.—H."

Hubert had rushed away from his outburst to Margaret to send off this note. No use hesitating, postponing, listening to Hendrik's "Presently" and "After a while." He felt that, before they met again, he must have gone too far to recede.

Hendrik slowly folded the paper very small and pushed it deep down into his waistcoat-pocket. He did not object to it as much as he himself might have feared. One sentence of it even pleasantly repeated the burden of his own thoughts. "The preliminaries take so long as it is." That was true. "Poor Hubert," he said to himself. "What a fool he is! One of the well-meaning fools that do half the mischief in the world. The downright idiots, like Elias, are far more harmless."

"Let us have tea in your room," said Cornelia. "I shall say 'not at home.' Besides, it is an Opera night."

"I thought you were going," said Hendrik, pausing in the hall. "I will go with you, if you like." He cast a rapid glance over his wife's dress. He remembered that this was a gala night.

"I have a slight headache," replied Cornelia, too proud to acknowledge her wish to please him. And she poured out tea for him, and he established himself comfortably in his big arm-chair, and, half timidly, put on his neat little black slippers. Cornelia detested slippers, and slipshod ways in general. And he was comfortable.

Then, presently, of her own free will, she spoke to him of the debts she had been making. She confessed to them, and repented of them. In fact, there was a little scene of penitence—not a scene in that sense in which the emotional can alone enjoy the word, but an interchange of a few cool words of explanation and calm proposals of amendment. There would be no more teasing, and no more misunderstandings. "And there would be no more parsimony," said Hendrik, very much softened. "I hope that my increasing prosperity will soon render all the old scraping and saving superfluous." And together they talked very quietly of plans for the future, that music-room, which Cornelia had always wanted built out, a couple of more horses in the stables—there was even a hint of a place in the country. Hendrik did not care for luxury as sensual gratification,

but he cared that his luxury should be seen. If once the motive for economy was gone, he would wish as eagerly as Cornelia to have the finest establishment in the whole city. Cornelia was delighted to discover how naturally giving up your own will may lead to having your own way. And Hendrik was very comfortable. Once only he asked whether the evening paper from Amsterdam had not come by the eight o'clock post. He was vexed at its not coming; it contained the Stock-Exchange Intelligence of the day. The ten o'clock post—the last—would bring it.

The ten o'clock did. He leisurely unfolded the newspaper and leant back in his chair to read it. Cornelia was occupied with a letter from an acquaintance wintering on the Riviera.

In the commercial news Hendrik happened upon a short paragraph, three lines at the most.

"The premature exposure of its plans has resulted in the complete collapse of the proposed petroleum trust. Prices have gone down a dollar to 1.25 in consequence. A further fall is expected."

He started up with a cry as of an animal in pain, and rushed to the bell, which he rang violently. Decidedly, Hendrik Lossell was not of that material of which successful speculators are made.

"Good Heavens, what is the matter?" cried Cornelia, starting up also and dropping her letter. She was truly alarmed by the tone of his voice.

"Oh, nothing," he answered hurriedly. "Business. Business. Tell Mulder to get me a cab. No, I shall run down and meet the tram."

He passed out into the hall. She followed after him.

"Where are you going at this hour, Hendrik?" she said. "Can it not wait till to-morrow? Do you not think it had better wait till to-morrow?"

"No, no," he answered, with a quick glance at the servant, who stood waiting in obedience to his master's call.

"No, it is nothing." He drew her back into the room. "It is a legal question," he said. "I am only going to run down to your brother to ask his opinion as a lawyer. I shall sleep all the better for knowing what he thinks."

Again she followed him, as he made for the hall-door.

"Thomas will probably be at the Club," she cried.

"Don't wait up for me," was his only answer as he hurried away.



## CHAPTER XLIV.

ALAS, POOR HUBERT !

NEXT morning, at an early hour, Hubert Lossell was introduced into Doctor Pillenaar's library.

The old gentleman—he must have been very near eighty-five at the time ; it can hardly be more than seven years since I heard of his death—the old gentleman was sitting in the bay-window of his room, his high-backed oak chair so placed up against the dark crimson curtain, by the side of a stand full of early flowers, that a broad beam of pale sunlight, which lay motionless across the brilliant hyacinths and tulips and the delicate overhanging creepers, should also rest on the tall, reposeful frame in its faded dressing-gown and on the tranquil face with its sparkle of silver beard. A big folio waited by the doctor's side, but he evidently preferred, for the moment, at any rate, the warmth of nature to the light of science. He was enjoying the fresh young sunshine with closed eyes and quiescent brain. He was enjoying it, as the aged alone can enjoy spring, with that intensity which is born of the experience that it is only a palliative, and that the real, unchangeable disease is winter, after all.

This old man had found sufficient opportunity of studying the universal complaint in his own person. He might have said with the patriarch Jacob that the days of his pilgrimage had been few and evil, had he understood Jacob's way of reckoning time. But he had not even that great traveller's consolation of knowing—for it ought to have

been a consolation—that the evil days had at least been few—on the contrary, he had lived a very long life and a very hard one, as lives go in these degenerate days. He had never learnt that passionate love of money which is the secret of many a great doctor's success. Rather was it a favourite saying of his that he had always found in the exercise of his profession more occasion to give than to receive. "It is a blessed profession," he would say, with a quiet smile, "on that account."

He had been a good, practical, common-sense family doctor, not one of those great lights of science which burn at the rate of a guinea a minute, but a hard-working practitioner who earned his modest half a crown per visit by a constant hurrying to and fro from door to door from day to day. Still, he might have managed sufficiently comfortably in his simple circle, had it not been for his singular ill-fortune. He had acted as surety for a brother at the beginning of his career, and the brother had run away, with some cash and more debts, to a South American State, where his children are at this present moment wealthy leaders of fashion. To meet the claims thus brought home to him, Dr. Pillemaar had been obliged to appeal to old Hendrik Lossell for assistance, and the merchant had afforded it on such security as was procurable, an inadequate mortgage, namely, on a house, which still remained to the doctor, after the rest of his little property had been done away with. All might now have come right, but for the quarrel about Elias's illness, which resulted in the sudden withdrawal of old Hendrik's loan. The doctor had to cast about for other help. He must have money by what means were still practicable. He fell into the hands of the Jews, and spent the rest of his long, laborious life in repaying them for their timely aid some twenty times over. "It is not my brother George who has ruined us," he always said to his wife, "but the Right Worshipful Town Councillor, Hendrik Lossell. And he has done it, practically, because I did not kill his son."

From the first, therefore, he felt irresistibly drawn towards the lad for whom he had undergone so much. It has been shown how he watched over Elias and protected him from the father's well-meaning efforts to annul the effects of the boy's affliction, even at the cost of the sufferer's health, or perhaps of his life.

The Town Councillor had been dead many years, and the old doctor himself was hardly any longer of this world, when one morning he said to the daughter who lived with him: "It was hardly *because* of my not having killed his son, I fancy, that Hendrik Lossell treated me as he did. I imagine he must have been actuated by an unreasoning feeling of *dépit*. He was angry with me for being as powerless as he against God. I am sorry I did not think of that sooner, so that I might have spoken of it to your mother. But now it is too late."

And so he was at peace with all men, and lived on quietly, healthfully, happily withal. He still went to see Elias occasionally, and he had a certain number of poor patients, whom he treated gratuitously. His sons had done well, and one of his daughters had married a rich man of business. "The evening is calm," he would say. And he rested in the sheltered corner of his study, among his plants and his books. It was there Hubert found him on the morning of his call.

"I am come once again, Doctor," said Hubert immediately, "to speak to you about my brother, in whom you have always taken such kindly interest. It is many years ago since we last discussed this same subject together. Before my departure for China."

"I remember," replied Dr. Pillenaar. "I hope Elias is not ill."

"Not otherwise than always," said Hubert. "Dr. Pillenaar, when last I spoke to you about my brother's health, we came to the conclusion that it was best to look upon him as one who was not ill, but well."

"I remember," said Pillenaar again.

"I have sometimes thought since, that we may have been mistaken."

"Independently of all other considerations," began the doctor, "it was the express wish of his own brothers——"

"I know," said Hubert. "Will you excuse my interrupting you? I mean that I am fully conscious the blame would be mine. That thought would make me the more desirous to undo whatever mischief I may have caused."

Now, Dr. Pillenaar had no reason to trust the brothers Lossell. He certainly liked Hubert better than Hendrik, but that was only because he disliked Hendrik most. He believed it possible that Hubert might still be capable of considering Elias's welfare in matters where it could not clash with his own. But wherever a case of conflicting interests arose, the doctor's experience of many years made him cautious, not to say unjust.

"Aha," he said to himself. "They want to discover that Elias is crazier than they used to think. I wonder why." He prudently waited for more.

"It appears to me," continued Hubert awkwardly, "that the position which we have created is a false one. And therefore I should wish to escape from it." He looked askance at the old man's placid, immovable face. It was useless to seek to learn anything from it. He twirled his gloves in his left hand. "That position has become a danger," he added softly, "and a temptation."

"Speak plainly, Mynheer, if you please," said Dr. Pillenaar coldly.

"I will do so as far as I can," answered Hubert, who was not an adept at plain speaking. "It is merely this, Doctor Pillenaar. I think it would be happier for all parties, and safer, and more as matters should be, if we were to take steps to obtain a legal declaration of Elias's incapacity to look after his own affairs."

"So much I understood before," rejoined the old doctor,

"but what I should like to know—if I am to know anything—is the reason, Mynheer Lossell. May I ask, has another will been found, after all these years?"

Hubert flushed up. "You do me wrong," he said. "The reasons for acting as we did, and still do, are absolutely unchanged."

"Then why do you propose an alteration?"

"Because they now appear to me inadequate."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "You speak in enigmas," he said. "The original arrangement was made on your behalf and that of your brother, to enable you to continue buying shares from the invalid. What advantage have you now in view which induces you to propose an alteration?"

Hubert got up and began pacing the room. After a moment he said, with suppressed emotion: "You wrong me. The change I propose is very disadvantageous to my brother and myself. But I repeat, and I can say no more, I believe it is wiser, and more prudent, that there should be no further irregularity on our side. Of course we know that, practically, Elias is incapable. Will you help me, or not?"

"Not unless I know more of the why and the wherefore," said Dr. Pillenaar.

"But, doctor, what more can there be to know?"

"Shall I be frank with you?"

"Oh, certainly," answered Hubert, casting down his uncertain gaze before the sudden upward sweep of the old man's eyes.

"Why should I not be? You have come to me unasked. Is it not that you have discovered that the present arrangement, combined with your long absence in China, has resulted in your brother's having obtained complete control over Elias's fortune, and that you want to get your share by being made co-trustee?"

Hendrik would have screamed out in petulant indigna-



tion at the injustice of such a charge, but Hubert was a man of straight and sluggish thought, not roused, unless roused altogether, once for all. And therefore he kept down emotion, to the last. "It is my destiny," he often complained to Margaret, "to be perpetually misunderstood." "But, Hubert," his wife would sometimes answer, "do you care to ask whether you are understandable?" "Oh, no; it is not that. It is fate."

"In no case should I propose that the trusteeship be divided between my brother and me," he now answered stiffly, but straight to the point. "One of Elias's cousins must be the second man, whoever may be the first. In every way this proposal of mine can only be a source of pecuniary loss to me."

"And the two and a half per cent. which the law allows to trustees?"

"My brother Hendrik has always received that amount hitherto, in virtue of his administration. It was included in the sum originally set apart for Elias's support. I must once more repeat, Dr. Pillenaar, that all the loss has been and still is on my side, and you must excuse my saying that I shall not repeat that statement again."

"That is right," replied the doctor, more genially than he had spoken hitherto. "I am willing to believe you, Mynheer Lossell, but you will understand that when I remember,—well! You are not acting *for* yourself. So be it. Then you are acting *against* your brother Hendrik. No other alternative is possible. Elias's condition is pretty much the same as it was when you made up your minds to consider him sane."

"It is worse," said Hubert eagerly, "I am sure it is worse. I am able to judge more clearly than others, perhaps, because I have been away so long."

"As for that, he judges best who has least cause for judging. In any case, your object is to defend Elias against your brother Hendrik. I can understand that."



"I never said so," cried Hubert.

"Therein," the doctor went on without heeding him, "I am willing to help you, most certainly, as far as I am able. But I doubt whether my help will be worth much. You will perhaps remember my telling you, when first you consulted me, that Elias's case is a very uncertain one. It is always impossible for a medical man to predict what view the jurists will take of a case of insanity. All that he can possibly affirm is that their view is sure to be incorrect. Under ordinary circumstances the difficulties would have been sufficient. But you and your brother have rendered them almost insurmountable. During these many years Elias has been considered sane, or at least treated as such. What reasons are you going to give the Judges for this sudden change in your opinion?"

"We have discovered that he is not as clear-headed as we thought," cried Hubert restlessly. "Look at that business about the Charity, for instance. My brother Hendrik most erroneously feared I would countenance such foolery. You were informed of the whole matter, I hear."

"You mean his desire to give up all he possessed to the poor," said the doctor. "That was nothing but the generous impulse of an unbalanced mind. Your brother's cupidity caused him to unreasonably exaggerate its importance. But you are right. That circumstance, more than any other I could think of, would bring home the fact of Elias's insanity to the judges of Koopstad."

"You do not mean to say, Dr. Pillenaar, that you do not think him insane?"

"I mean to say, Mynheer Lossell, that you have appeared not to consider him insane hitherto. And that, by taking such action during a long period of time, you have made it impossible for yourselves to assert his insanity. You have certainly made it impossible for me, a medical man. I was an accomplice to the first trick, and therefore

you must get another for the second, unless some powerful new consideration be adducible."

"There is none," said Hubert, "except that we find the responsibility too great. Rather than continue to bear it, we abandon the effort to redistribute the shares."

"Then, Mynheer," replied the doctor, once more very coldly, "this interview is at an end. As I told you at the beginning, without complete confidence, all discussion between us must be useless. And seeing you refuse me yours, I have no more to say."

"I really do not understand you," declared Hubert helplessly, standing in the middle of the room, unwilling to go, unwilling to stay. Once more the old man looked full at him, this time with indignation in his gaze: "You have a motive," he said, his voice trembling with contempt. "Will you name it? Or shall I?"

"Do you," said Hubert, "explain."

"I trust you," continued the doctor, "as much as I can trust a Lossell, that is to say, no farther than necessary. Elias is not one of—them. But I believe that you have come here with the sincere desire to save Elias—and yourself—from ruin, while you can. You want to defend him—and yourself—against your brother. I can understand it, Mynheer. It was time."

"My brother is honest," cried Hubert. "The charge is false. I wish to defend Elias against all injury, against myself!"

The doctor hesitated for a moment. Our admirable nineteenth-century civilization has reached such a condition of purity that it has been compelled to decree, in self-preservation, that for one man to speak the truth about another is always heavily punishable by law. Dr. Pillenaar knew this. He was thinking of it. "What do I care?" he said to himself. "At my age an honest man has learnt many times over that there is nothing more illegal than the law. Anything is preferable to continued innuendo."

"Am I to believe," he began aloud, "that you come here unasked to speak to me about Elias's affairs, and that you are unaware that Hendrik Lossell is one of the wildest speculators in Koopstad?" He sat still unmoved, in the sunshine, among his plants, with the open book by his side. Yet in spite of his outward calm, his soul was perturbed within him, for he read the answer, before it was spoken, in his visitor's face, and was sorry for the man.

"You mean about that South African Syndicate," said Hubert. "How could I dream that you knew of it? It was very wrong of Hendrik. But that matter is entirely arranged. We have settled it together. Elias shall not be the loser. His fortune is intact."

"I know nothing of a South African Syndicate," replied the doctor, "but I know that when a man risks hundreds of thousands of florins in such articles as petroleum and tobacco, the sooner other people's money is taken out of his hands, the better for both them and him."

The room seemed to heave to and fro for a moment around Hubert. He saw nothing but the old man's white face in a mist. He stumbled vaguely towards it, and was glad to realize, after a moment, that he had dropped into a seat.

"I did not know," he said thickly. "Tell me about it, doctor. Don't keep anything back."

"I am not a man of business, Mynheer Lossell," replied Pillenaar. "What I have heard has been told me by one who is——" Hubert understood that the doctor was alluding to his son-in-law. "It appears that it is pretty well known in commercial circles that your brother has an enormous stake in the petroleum trade. *That* is an open secret which you would have known before me, did a man's own household not always learn least of his 'silent' life. But few people are probably aware as yet that he has been risking another fortune of late in tobacco. He has been buying up a large number of shares in the

South Sumatra Company. My informant knows this, because he himself happens to be largely interested in the tobacco trade—pah, my son-in-law, as you know, is a director of the rival company, the Royal Sumatra.”

“But how can he know,” objected Hubert, “that the shares are bought for my brother?”

“How can he know? Do not ask me. How does the successful man of business know everything a day too soon, and the unsuccessful one everything a day too late? All the difference lies there. How is it done? By-the-bye, the shares are not bought for your brother directly. They are bought for—and often by—Thomas Alers. But as Thomas Alers has no money, only debts, it is not difficult to guess that he is acting for his intimate friend and confederate.”

“My brother has no money either,” said Hubert.

The doctor’s silence answered him. Neither spoke for a moment or two. Then the wretched man started up.

“I must go to the ‘Officer of Justice’ at once,” he said. “At once. All the more reason for me to act without delay. You will help me, Dr. Pillenaar, by all the means in your power.”

The doctor had risen also. He laid his hand on the young man’s sleeve. “Be careful,” he said. “Remember, as I told you just now, that these years of delay have placed you in a most painful predicament. You will have to weigh every word which you speak to the officials. The honour of your name is at stake. Would it not be possible to reason with your brother, and arrest his progress in time? Can you not settle the matter without giving it publicity? Of all moments this is the most unfortunate for the step you propose.” He was thinking of Elias. And of the old, honoured house of Volderdoes which Elias represented.

“Speak to him first,” he added earnestly.

“I have spoken already,” said Hubert, in a deep, dull voice.

"Has he lied to me all this time, then?" thought Dr. Pillenaar. "Impossible."

Hubert had been standing in the middle of the floor with downcast eyes. Suddenly he burst out passionately:

"But Elias *is* crazy, Dr. Pillenaar. He *is* crazy; he *is* crazy. You know he is. Why not tell it to the authorities, and have done?"

"He is not one whit crazier than ten years ago," repeated the physician patiently. "And when the legal officer comes to see him—as you know will be necessary—he may probably be very rational and calm. This is not a case of ordinary insanity. No medical man can certify to Elias's being insane. He is certainly not in a state to manage his property. But then, everyone will at once point out that he never can have been that. I have often noticed that he seems to be able to think most lucidly under some strong emotional strain. A sudden shock concentrates all his powers for the moment. I have even fancied that perhaps some violent commotion, psychological, or may be only physical, such as the original blow, might restore the lost activity of his brain. I hardly think so still. And yet similar results have not infrequently been obtained, but always by accident. Science knows nothing of the how or why. This is a very peculiar case. And yours is a very awkward position, Mynheer Lossell. I wish you well out of it."

"It is," said Hubert. "It is much more than that." And then he turned and walked away without a word of farewell.

"I will help you, if I can," the doctor called after him. Perhaps the old man felt some twinges of self-reproach for the unamiable manner in which he had received his visitor. He *could* not behave to those Lossells as if he trusted them.

And yet he was sorry for Hubert. He would have been sorrier had he known all. "It is the finger-post upon the

road," said the young merchant to himself, as he walked rapidly away. "What's the use of struggling to turn right or left?" His mind was full of the thought how shamelessly Hendrik had lied to him in their solemn reconciliation and compact, barely twenty-four hours ago. Yet to some extent he unwillingly brought false accusation against his brother, for Hendrik had not known, at the time, of the purchases already effected by Alers on his behalf. "You mustn't raise prices by too sudden a demand," the lawyer observed to his own wise and active mind. And therein he was undoubtedly correct.



## CHAPTER XLV.

### SOCIAL SCIENCE.

HUBERT's interview with the legal functionary to whom he now immediately addressed himself was not a pleasant one. Things went exactly as Dr. Pillenaar, with his large experience of similar matters, had foreseen. The Officer was polite—too polite, urbane—but he was uncomfortable, suspicious of something left unsaid. When a government official is laboriously civil, beware of him. He is out of his element. Said Hubert: "What does the man conjecture?" And yet Dr. Pillenaar had prepared him.

"Since when has your brother been in this condition, Mynheer Lossell?" questioned the Officer smoothly. He knew perfectly well.

"Since a great number of years," replied Hubert. "But—but he is much worse, at least, he is worse than he used to be."

"Of course, or no alteration would have become necessary. And has any doctor recommended you to take a step at present, which seems not to have been considered advisable before?"

"My brother's life-long medical attendant also considers him incapable of acting for himself."

"Ah! Indeed. Life-long, as you say. And has he always considered him capable up till now?"

"Circumstances modify opinions," said Hubert awkwardly.

"I entirely agree with you there. Well, Mynheer Los-

sell, this whole matter only indirectly concerns me, you know. Your first step must be to send in your application to the Court, and then we shall see. My rôle is only to advise, you are doubtless aware, in this as in most similar complications; the judges decide. The Court must see the patient, you will remember. In most cases that is the merest formality, but yours is such a peculiar one. Under ordinary circumstances there would of course not be the slightest difficulty. There never is when the doctors are agreed. And from all I have heard of your eldest brother's position I should say there is not the faintest doubt that the sooner he is declared unfit to look after his own affairs the better. But then, you see we have all said that for the last ten years at the least. All Koopstad has said it. The case is notorious. The fortune altogether unusual. He has had, theoretically, at any rate, free command of it all this time. The whole city is in possession of the facts, and of more than the facts. You have heard, I dare say, of the commotion there was after his appearance in public on the occasion of your other brother's marriage. There was a good deal of unpleasant talk at the time, ridiculous talk, I admit. But all this makes the sudden change of front seem awkward. Speaking frankly, I regret that you have not some more distinct and altogether recent cause of perplexity to refer to. If your brother had taken to throwing his money into the water, now, or if he had lighted his fire with a bundle of bank-notes. Nothing of the kind, eh? He is just as reasonable as he has always been? Well, perhaps you will think of some explanation. As I say, it is hardly my business. At least, not at this initial stage. Good-day, Mynheer Lossell."

Hubert understood one thing clearly when he came away from this second unsatisfactory interview. Everyone was agreed that Elias ought to be placed under "curators." But, on that very account, nobody would understand the excessive delay. He did not apprehend, as Dr. Pillenaar

seemed to, the impression Elias's semi-lucidity might make on the authorities, but then Pillenaar, as a medical man, was ready to ascribe any follies to the representatives of the law. What Hubert foresaw was that he and his brother would have to explain away the interval between their father's death and to-day. More even than that, between to-day and Elias's coming of age. Well, their father had been an honest man. But the deficit? How account for the deficit, if it be true, as he had just heard from Dr. Pillenaar, that Hendrik had made away with his step-brother's money?

It *could* not be true. "I will not believe it," said Hubert, a hundred times over. He remembered their first solemn vow, when they were still lads not yet out of their teens. He—Hubert—had kept it. He recalled each incident of yesterday's altercation. In that painful quarrel he had sacrificed his wife's small fortune to save his brother's honour, which was also his own. And Hendrik had played with him, cheated him, mocked him? It could not be. This money which he used for his speculations, he must have raised it by some other means. It could not be Elias's! And yet—

And yet, he had declared that he had no money of his own, not even security. How can you raise money without security? He had pointed out how he had sunk every available penny in the business. Hubert knew that this was true. Hubert himself had bought but very few of his step-brother's shares. "I am poor and honest," he said proudly to himself, over and over again.

He did not again ask for an explanation from Hendrik. He dared not; he trusted neither that slippery individual, nor his own gloomy, stormy, unfathomable self. "Let Destiny work round," he said. "It solves all problems." He shrank from every problem, in the solving of which were involved his fierce passions and weak, bridleless will. He told his brother that the request to the Court was ready.

Would Hendrik sign it, or should he, or both? "Do as you please," said Hendrik curtly. And Hubert sent in his demand alone. Presently he informed Hendrik that he had received an answer, and Hendrik said: "Indeed?" without looking up from his writing. And from time to time Hubert stated thus briefly the progress of the whole miserable business. He was acting alone. On the whole, the brothers lived apart during this terrible week, even much more than formerly. They met at the Office, as was unavoidable, and barely spoke to each other. The air was heavy with impending catastrophe. A mist hung between them. It could not last. But Hubert lacked the desperate courage to flash through it a fresh gleam of hideous light.

One day, however, he found himself compelled to say:

"Had we not better appoint a day, Hendrik, on which we can look through the accounts together and make an exact inventory of Elias's property?"

"Monday," said Hendrik, his eyes on his desk.

"Monday is the day they have appointed to see Elias."

"Tuesday," said Hendrik, his attitude unchanged.

"Would Saturday not be better?"

"Saturday is impossible. Seventeen and nineteen are thirty-six, and five are forty-one."

Hendrik struck the handbell in front of him. Saturday was the day of the annual meeting of the South Sumatra Tobacco Company.

For a moment Hubert had thought of questioning Alers, but he had abandoned that idea almost at once. It was a matter between his brother and himself. And he saw the honour of their name going down in the struggle. Well, if it must go, it must go. He could not do more than defend it to the last. And he fought with the fierceness of a fatalist.

In the depths of his heart he still hoped that the money would be forthcoming, and that all would turn out right. He had even sought comfort in the hope that Hendrik might succeed in satisfactorily cooking the accounts so as

to smooth away any vestiges of peculations. But this fancy he knew to be a futile one. Vast as Elias's fortune was, its disposal, in a few great lumps, would be found too simple to render even this worst of all expedients anything but a useless farce. Hubert would find himself face to face with the facts. What must he do? Denounce his own brother? He had already taken the first steps in that direction. The others would doubtless follow. He must save Elias's property in the first place. He must keep his most sacred vow to his dead father. He must save the great house of Volderdoes. Save it? Was he not ruining it as fast as he could by bringing disgrace upon its leading partner? But the judges need not know of the deficit, if there was a deficit, after all. And yet, if they asked whether the property had remained intact during all the preceding years, what must Hubert answer? What must he say to the family council, Elias's cousins?

He looked across from his desk, where he sat with his face between his hands, and groaned aloud. Hendrik paused in his writing, and stared quietly for a second, with uplifted pen, then he smiled, and returned to his work.

It was impossible for Margaret not to perceive something of what was going on in her husband's heart. In fact, he told her of it, himself, in his own peculiar way. In brief outbursts of a dozen passionate words, protests against God's wisdom or man's folly, sudden, incoherent exculpations of himself. Such explanations, although they were devoid of any direct reference to persons or events, sufficed to reveal the workings of his mind to the woman who loved him. And that circumstances had rendered it necessary to apply for a legal recognition of Elias's incompetency he had told her in so many words. The fact was in no wise a secret. It could not be. It would be all over Koopstad tomorrow. "I only do hope it won't lead to his being treated as insane, Hubert," Margaret had said anxiously, "because



he really isn't insane, I can assure you. He is just a child, a child with a weak intellect and a very bad memory. He only remembers by likes and dislikes. He has not lost his reason. But it is a reason of the heart, not of the brain. And that is really all. It would be awful, Hubert, if he were locked up as insane."

"No one thinks of doing that," answered Hubert impatiently. "It is merely a question of the management of his property. Please don't go about telling people we want to lock him up."

"I do not betray your confidence, Hubert," she said, a little nettled, "such as it is."

"I have no secrets," he replied. "Only rogues have secrets. And honest men can enjoy the pleasure of finding them out."

She did not answer. Long ago she had put two and two together, and understood that Hubert had discovered some disgraceful fact in connection with Hendrik, and that the knowledge of this fact, whatever it might be, was making him utterly miserable. Probably the difficulty was connected with money, Elias's money. "There was certainly too much of that," thought Margaret. Perhaps Hendrik agreed with her.

"The unique object of the bad men on earth," added Hubert, "seems to be to torment the good. And therefore the most sensible thing, it appears, would be for the good men to clear off the bad. Why, that is Kingsley's theory," he suddenly cried, with a laugh. "The one we were reading about the other day. You see what comes of reading your style of books! What a St. Bartholomew that would be!" And he stared in front of him with dreamy eyes.

"There is none good, no, not one," said Margaret softly.

She was teaching Elias to understand that, with many other truths. And she had no cause to complain of her pupil's aptitude; in some things he was even more willing to learn than her quicker-witted children, whose questions



would flit away from metaphysical abstractions to every bud and every butterfly they came across. Elias, to whom the visible was invisible and the audible inaudible, was spared that struggle between sense and faith, in which the souls of most of us are either wounded or slain. And, doubtless, it was this his infirmity which enabled him more easily to comprehend that which eye hath not seen nor ear heard. He could not restrict himself, as did Hendrik, for instance, to believing what he beheld with his eyes; and therefore he was content to accept what he saw with his heart. Looking up in the clear darkness of his night, he knew the heavens to be ablaze with light. He himself understood something of this—vaguely. “Mother Margaretha,” he once said, “do you know, I think blind people see some things best. Johanna doesn’t see half the things I see. She says she only sees what is just straight in front of her. I can’t see that, but I seem to see everything you tell me. I see Jesus blessing the little children, and riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. And I see—I see Him, on the cross.” He opened his great eyes and turned them full upon her—the strong man, in his massive beauty, his enforced repose—and she saw that they were full of tears.

“It is dreadful to be blind,” said Elias a moment later. “I should like to see the children, and you. It is dreadful never to know what people are like.”

The fresh plans of self-spoliation which he had first mentioned to Hubert, still incessantly occupied his unelastic brain. A very mania of sacrifice had fallen upon him, chiefly as the unavoidable result of Margaret’s religious teaching. He had caught hold of the two truths that Christ had given up everything for our sakes, and that it was our duty to imitate Him in all matters, and the conclusions he drew were straight to the point and in complete accordance with his generous, single-thoughted nature. He had found out for himself, before anyone ever spoke to him of Christianity, its great central reality of abandonment.

And, more vehemently than ever, he desired, with the new light upon him, to bestow all his superfluity on those who had not enough. "I don't think I should like to give myself," he said frankly. "But, you know, Mother Margaretha, I can't, I can't *do* anything for anybody. I ought to give all that I can, and I shall. I always knew that God had made the poor so the rich could be good too. How awful it would be if everybody were rich and went to hell. I am glad Hendrik allowed me to spend all my money on the poor people. It is kind of him. Only there must always be enough for Volderdoes Zonen, or papa will be angry when he comes back."

He was very troublesome. He now persisted in distributing flowers to every one who came to ask for them, just as he had always scattered coppers on his walks. The thing soon became known in the city, and troops of the raggedest children flowed out to Elias's villa and besieged its gate. Elias cried and stormed, if they were driven away. His pleasure was to sit at the entrance with John, a couple of baskets at his side, and to place a flower in each successive little dirty palm. It was fortunately easy to deceive him, and to hire and wash a dozen children who rotated around him. But then again, after a time, his delicate powers of perception learned to distinguish this orderly procession from the hubbub of a clamorous crowd. And he was very angry at the deception. People ought never to have deceived Elias. Johanna, despite all her affection, never grasped that truth, from sheer lack of refinement. She belonged to a class which habitually lies. But the recoil of the discovery was too cruel. Elias often said to himself, "It would not matter so much not seeing, if people only always told you exactly what there was to see."

But the distributions of flowers, and, still more, the occasional offers to beggars to share the carriage with its rightful owner, the practice, in one word, of the lessons of Christianity by this fool who had great possessions, caused

increased annoyance to all well-regulated minds in Christian Koopstad. The Burgomaster, who had already remonstrated with Hendrik on former occasions, once more appealed to the brothers to put a stop to such vagaries as these. "Social order, you know, and indiscriminate charity. And the divinely instituted equation: Bare feet: Kid Boots = Dusty Roads: Carriage Cushions. And, furthermore, you must especially be careful not to pauperize the poor." It was quite true. The Burgomaster was right. And so was Elias. It is a sad, mad world, my Masters. Happy he who sees only the madness, or only the sadness. Happiest who sees neither. What can you expect of a fool?

"I want to be like Christ," said Elias; "I want to give all I don't need for my own use to those who haven't got it. But I don't think I could give what I need for our own house. And I—I don't think I could give myself: but nobody wants me. I don't think I want to be quite like Christ, Mother Margaretha."

"He is not mad, dear Hubert," said Margaret. "Only like a little child."

"And therefore we desire to see him declared incompetent," said Hubert.

"Ah, the pity of it!" chorused the ladies, married and unmarried. "A fortune lying waste."

"He is insane. The sooner he were locked up the better for us all," said the Burgomaster of Koopstad.

And the Burgomaster of Koopstad is a very shrewd man. He learned a great deal in his day from his grandmother, who was cousin, by no means removed, to old Mynheer Nicholas van Dam, the former perpetual Lord of Koopstad. They tell me the old gentleman is no longer connected with the place. People say he is dead, but that I can hardly believe. Anyhow, its streets and squares must look strangely deserted without the once familiar presence of him whom all scoffers used to call "Old Nick."

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE CATASTROPHE.

It was on Friday, the very Friday which brought Hubert Lossell the decisive letter from Dr. Pillenaar,—

Ah, true, I have not told you yet about that letter.

“Friday is always an unlucky day,” said Hubert. “It is wonderful how these things come out, without any earthly reason why.”

He was sitting in the brothers’ private room at the Office, writing, alone. Hendrik had gone out, without saying whither or why. Hubert was not sorry to see him go. The hour was a quiet one, the period after lunch when lazy people do nothing, and busy people do less than usual. There was a lull in the day’s work, and the lofty sun shone briskly through the Office windows. Hubert sat at his desk writing slowly, half his mind in his letter, half in his sombre thoughts. And the flowery Chinaman over the mantelpiece sat serenely watching him, and winking at his back from time to time.

Presently a visitor was announced, on business. The visitor, unconscious of his mistake, sat down in the chair from which the merchant had just risen, and faced round to the centre-desk with its vacant seat. Hubert found himself compelled to choose between his brother’s place of honour and one of the two low arm-chairs beside it, which were usually offered to strangers. He did not take his brother’s seat. To his visitor’s surprise he drew forward

the fauteuil. "These lazy young men!" thought the other, and shook his head, which was white.

The conference was not a long one. After a few minutes the old gentleman rose to depart. He secretly regretted not having found Hendrik in, for, like most of his colleagues on 'Change, he regarded Hendrik as by far the better man of business. "We can settle the particulars later on," he said, "I am quite satisfied to have your word. It is always pleasant to find one's self in commercial relations with your house, Mynheer Lossell. I am one of the oldest merchants in Koopstad, and I have never heard anyone impugn the good faith and spotless integrity of Volderdoes Zonen." He went his way, and Hubert closed the door upon him with a self-scorning smile. The Chinaman leered in placid intelligence. He knew that the words must be taken commercially, that is, with plenty of water—like the tea.

Hubert cast a glance through the great plate-glass partition at the outer office with its silent activity of numerous bent heads and restless pens, and at the noisy hurry and bustle on the quay beyond. What a mighty machine it was, quivering, throbbing, pulsing onward, with the hand of a thief at the guiding stop.

A young clerk was coming up through the Office with a note in his hand. And that note was Dr. Pillenaar's.

Hubert took it wearily. More business. More tea at so-much. Black or green or mixed. All the little accurate daily details, the little holes into which thoughts must mechanically fit, were inexpressibly revolting to him at this terrible crisis. His mind shuddered back from them, as the red-hot furnace recoils hissing from a splash of cold water. Another order. Two, two and three, two and nine. Mixed tea, and green, and black. And superfine pure Chinese.

Dr. Pillenaar's letter was very short :

"Wel Edel Geboren Heer : Come and see me at once.

"J. C. PILLENAAR."

Hubert sat down and wrote an answer, saying that, to his great regret, he must delay for an hour or two, as he was alone at the Office.

He folded it and put it into an envelope, and carefully addressed it. And then he tore it up and rang for a head clerk.

"I am compelled to go out for a few moments," he said. "I do not expect to be long."

And he went to Dr. Pillenaar.

He found the old doctor seated, just as he had left him, when he had run away from his disclosures a few days ago. It seemed as if Death had forgotten this quiet man in his corner, among his flowers and his books and his thoughts of a long, long past. The doctor motioned his visitor to a seat. Then he sat silent for some minutes, as if he found it difficult to begin the conversation.

"You sent for me——" Hubert hazarded at last.

"Yes. I have something to tell you, Mynheer Lossell. It is not an easy thing to tell. Ah, that is not fair. I am keeping you in suspense. Well, here goes. We spoke, when last you were here, of the South Sumatra Tobacco Company. Chance has put me into possession of strange information with regard to that company. I have sent for you to advise you to persuade your brother to sell out to-day."

Hubert pulled out his watch. "He can't," he said. "Exchange hours are over. But, Doctor, everyone says the company is flourishing. The annual meeting takes place to-morrow. An enormous dividend is predicted. And the shares, which went down last week, on account of malicious reports, have come up again recently to their former outrageous price."

"I must tell you," said the Doctor, "come what may. The matter is briefly this. I hear that the Company is indeed as extravagantly prosperous as the price of the shares would give reason to suppose. A dividend of fifty-five per



cent. will be announced to-morrow, and the shares which are at present at about 500 above par ought to go up, Hendrik Lossell thinks, two, three hundred more in consequence."

"Yes," said Hubert, "and I fancy he is right."

"He is wrong. They will be down to one hundred per cent. to-morrow evening."

"Impossible," said Hubert quietly, suppressing a smile.

"The matter is very simple, I believe. The Royal Sumatra Company, the sole rival of the South Sumatra, has been busy for a long time surreptitiously buying up the required majority of its shares. These are scattered, as you will understand, over the necessary number of agents. At to-morrow's meeting a proposal will be brought forward to liquidate the Company and to sell all its possessions to the Royal Sumatra, which has fortunately stepped in at this crisis and kindly offers a price which will guarantee to all shareholders the full amount of their shares. Cent. per cent., you see, and perhaps a slight surplus. The proposal will be put to the vote and carried."

"Impossible," repeated Hubert, though with less assurance. "Utterly impossible. My dear Doctor, such an operation as that would be punishable by law."

"Do you think so?" asked the Doctor. It was now his turn to suppress a smile. "I do not fancy the conspirators are very afraid of legal proceedings. They have laid their plans carefully, and a conspiracy will be difficult to prove. There will be a large number of voters—comparatively—at to-morrow's meeting, but, in reality, I believe the great mass of the shares is in the hands of two owners only, the Royal Sumatra Company on the one side, and your brother on the other."

"Impossible again," cried Hubert; "their capital is far too large for that!"

"One thing more. The Royal Sumatras, in their anxiety to be sure of their majority, have bought more shares

than they require. That accounts for the great rise in prices, notwithstanding unsatisfactory reports. They are striving, with all their might and main, as you can believe, to get the superfluous shares off their hands. And I know that a large quantity have been offered en bloc to your brother at 50 per cent. under Exchange price. The affair is to be settled to-night, at a Notary's."

Hubert sat silent, thinking it out as best he could. Then he asked abruptly: "How do you know all this?"

"You need hardly ask me," replied Dr. Pillenaar.

"How many shares do you believe my brother to have?"

"I cannot tell. I have heard speak of one hundred. In any case I know that the offer for this evening is of two hundred more."

"Three hundred shares at six hundred per cent.," cried Hubert. "Eighteen hundred thousand florins!\* Dr. Pillenaar!"

"It is a gigantic undertaking," said the Doctor. "None but the Royal Sumatra could have risked it. However, they were bent on buying up their rivals, and this transaction puts a couple of millions in their pockets. Clear gain."

"To my brother," said Hubert softly, "it would mean a loss of a million and a half, at one blow, independently of any losses he may previously have sustained."

"It is on that account I sent for you," said Dr. Pillenaar. "What is done can't be mended, but you can still prevent the chief catastrophe. This new vast purchase must not take place. It is outrageous. It is scandalous," cried Dr. Pillenaar, waxing angry. "Are we to sit quietly by and see Elias reduced to beggary? You must go to your broth-

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\* For the benefit of the reader who considers the prices above given to be excessive the fact may be stated that to-day's Stock Intelligence, as published by the Amsterdam Bourse, quotes Arendsburg Tobacco Shares at 900, and Deli ditto at 720.

er instantly, Mynheer Lossell. You may confide to him what I have told you. Let him keep silent about it, if he can. If he won't, let him speak. I do not care. I have quarrelled—I fear almost irremediably—with my son-in-law about this business. I cannot help it. I must save Elias. And the honoured name of Volderdoes. I rejoice that God has spared me to work out my revenge upon the Lossells before I die.”

“I am going,” said Hubert, stumbling to his feet.

“It is my son-in-law and Lankater who have arranged the matter between them. The offer is supposed to come from a speculator who cannot hold out.”

“But this story of the proposed liquidation,” said Hubert, with a last flicker of hope. “It is outrageous. It is impossible. It is a crime.”

“I am not a man of business,” answered Dr. Pillenaar. “Is it? I thought you were.”

Hubert went straight back to the Office, to the Office-door.

“Has Mynheer Hendrik returned?” he asked the old door-keeper.

“No, Mynheer.”

“If he does, tell him to wait for me here. Tell him that some important news has arrived.”

“Very well, Mynheer.”

Then he walked out to Hendrik's house and inquired for him there. That was useless, as he had expected it would be. Cornelia came into the hall at the sound of her brother-in-law's voice. She was dressed to go out.

“Can you tell me where Hendrik is, Hubert?” she asked. “What! are you looking for him too? How provoking. He was to fetch me at half-past two to accompany me to the General's reception. Their daughter is going to be married next week, as you know. Are you going there also? Oh no, I wasn't thinking; you do not know them.

It is extremely annoying! I should not wonder if he forgot altogether. And he has got the carriage. I am at a loss what to do. I can't stop away. And I can hardly arrive there in a cab."

"No; hardly in a cab," repeated Hubert. "It is very annoying for you. I should not wonder if he forgot altogether, as you say. Good-bye. If he comes here, tell him to meet me at the Office at five. Or at eight."

Cornelia remained alone with her annoyance, plus a large dose of indignant astonishment. "It was almost as if he were laughing at me," she said to herself. "How rude Hubert can be, to be sure! I am afraid I shall have to go in a cab, after all." She looked down at her new spring toilet and sighed. She wondered whether the dirty cab-cushions would soil it. "Of course Margaret need not go," she thought. "How could I ask? She has got no friends, and no new dresses. She has got nothing but babies."

Hubert went down the road again, back towards the centre of the town. What next? He did not know. He could have hardly told himself what he had done already since he left Dr. Pillenaar. One thought only stood out clearly in his mind. "I must save Elias. And the honoured name of Volderdoes." A stranger could say that. The man could say it whom the Lossells had done life-long wrong. And to attain his end that man could break away from the stay of his old age, casting from him, probably, even the material support of which he stood in need. It was thus that the upright did right. And he—Hubert?

As a child, he had taken his eldest brother's life, and left him only sentient death. It was but natural that, as a man, he should stand by and watch that same step-brother's spoliation of the means of existence. It was only rational that Hendrik should step forward and claim his turn.

And then, suddenly, he understood that it was impossible that this thing should happen, impossible, absurd. Such

monstrosities did not take place. He laughed aloud to himself at the absurdity of the idea, the hideous absurdity. Somebody looked round at him in passing, and said: "Well, Lossell, what is it? Give us the benefit of the joke!" He awoke to the fact that he was standing, in the full daylight, on the busy market-place by the Great Church, and that an acquaintance had just gone by.

He shook himself together, and looked about him. And his eyes travelled slowly up the lofty tower of the sacred building, which rose calm and pure into the pale blue sky. It seemed as if the feeling it called up in him increased the discord of his thoughts, for he laughed again, only softly this time, under his breath.

"I must act," he said. "Act. Do something. That is why Pillenaar sent for me. I do not believe that Hendrik has taken Elias's money. There must be some mistake, or some other explanation. And I must find it. At once."

Then he went back to the Office.

"Is Mynheer Hendrik come back?" he asked.

"No, Mynheer."

"Has anybody any idea where he is?"

"No, Mynheer."

"If he should come back, tell him to wait for me."

"Yes, Mynheer."

But as he walked away again, along the quay, heedless of lifted caps and grinning faces, he told himself that this primary search for Hendrik was useless. Hendrik would not explain. Hendrik would lie, as he had done before. When the brothers met, Hubert must *know*. He must be in possession of the facts of the case.

"I shall go to Amsterdam," he decided. "I should have done it sooner. When I first thought of that way."

By "that way" he meant an inquiry at headquarters, whether the great sums invested in Elias's name in Government securities—"inscribed in the Great Book of the National Debt," as they call it—were still intact. Almost



all Elias's property was thus "inscribed," and it is difficult to get at money so entrusted to the State. Hubert would have sooner investigated the actual condition of his step-brother's fortune, had he not shrunk from the possible scandal which any steps on his part might call forth. Besides, he had not till now believed the danger to be so imminent. Granted that Hendrik had used a certain sum as security to help him in the speculative purchase of stock (and probably the amount was much exaggerated by report), yet such malversations, though they might lead to a deficit, did not mean ruin. The newly acquired funds would always furnish a relative guarantee, and Hendrik would be compelled in a day or two to wind up his Stock Exchange transactions and give an account of his administration. He would doubtless be able to do so, Hubert had thought, for Hubert, although he disapproved of the South Sumatra speculation, could not deny that it had bidden fair to become a financial success. He had waited, therefore, with a certain amount of confidence. At the bottom of his heart he had felt that the discovery of a slight deficit would not be altogether unpalatable to him, as it would doubtless enable him to get himself appointed curator. He was surprised to discover, on looking back, how small the danger now seemed which he had thought so terrible a few hours ago.

The time was gone by for nice distinction and delicate reticence. It is true that a breath of distrust on the clear surface of a merchant's commercial credit may bring ruin, but what matters that consideration when a storm is already shaking the foundations of his house? Hubert looked at his watch again. He had constantly done so, often without noticing what it was intended to tell him. He now saw that he could hurry across to Amsterdam, immediately. He had just time to catch a train. He forgot all about his wife, who would be expecting him in vain.

He reached the station at the last moment and jumped



into an empty compartment, non-smoking, so as to escape the companionship of other business men. But, just as the train was preparing to depart and his solitude seemed pretty well assured, the door was again thrown open, and a lady was hurried in. He knew her, and she was a very voluble lady. She told him all about her nearly missing the train, and the annoyance it would have caused her, and the reception at the General's, to which she had been. "I saw your sister-in-law there," she said. "One is really surprised to discover into what a handsome woman she has developed. But, then, she dresses so exquisitely, and that is a great thing. Her dresses are costly, as if she did not care what she pays for them, and tasteful, as if she reckoned out every item herself. Do you not think so?"

Hubert, though he answered her in monosyllables, yet had to pay some attention to what she was saying, for she was one of those provoking rattles, who, while they never allow you to make a remark of your own, yet insure your listening to their monotonous clatter by pausing from time to time with a sudden question or appeal. After Hubert had answered "Yes" to her inquiry about the number of his children, he felt that he must listen with one ear, if he could. All the time, however, he was uninterruptedly thinking: "It is impossible. It is too utterly absurd. Such things are not. I shall find out in Amsterdam that it is not true."

Upon reaching the metropolis, he drove straight to the insignificant building which is set apart as a Temple of National Thriftlessness. The complicated nineteenth-century State has at least a proper sense of its dignity. To beg it is ashamed. It only borrows.

The streets were noisy with constant traffic, bright with reflections from the westering sun. Hubert pulled down the blinds of his cab impatiently. And then he remembered that their clear green in the brilliant light would

attract general attention, and he hastily pushed them up again.

The Bureaux were closed for the day. That Hubert had already foreseen. He had intended from the first to address himself directly to a high functionary, connected with the administration, whom he happened slightly to know. The man was a connection of his mother's. To avoid personalities, he must be alluded to in these pages as Mynheer B.

"But is Mynheer B. perhaps still in the building?" queried Hubert.

No; Mynheer B. had left half an hour ago. He had probably gone home.

Hubert bade the cabman drive to the official's private address.

"Not at home," said the servant there.

"But where," cried Hubert from the cab-window, "do you think Mynheer can be?"

The servant—a fat, untidy female—stood in the door and grinned.

"Would you ask your mistress, perhaps," suggested Hubert mildly; "I have come up to town on purpose to see him. I cannot stay——"

Nor, apparently, could the maid, for at the first mention of her mistress she retreated down the passage as rapidly as if she feared that Hubert in his cab might be mistaken for a follower. Half-way down she stopped suddenly, remembered something, came back again, and carefully closed the door.

"It is fate," said Hubert, and sank back in the musty, velvet-cushioned cab.

If it was fate, then the untidy servant must have been Atropos—wasn't it Atropos who cut the string?

"Back to the station," said Hubert. And the cabman, who cared for nothing as long as he was paid by the hour, clambered up slowly on to his box again and lumbered away.

The principal streets of all Dutch towns are so narrow that foot-passengers, even when they keep close to the houses (there are practically no pavements), unavoidably stare into the windows of every carriage that squeezes by. Solitary progress through these streets in a vehicle with many windows is, therefore, a trying ordeal for a modest man. Hubert was not immodest, as a rule, but at this moment he was also desperate. And there is nothing which makes us shrink from the company of our fellow-creatures so much as our desperation among their indifference.

He lay in a corner of the roomy four-wheeler and stared out into the street with hot, uninterested eyes. And at the slow and shaky turning of a corner, the face he had been in search of looked straight through the square of glass into his obscurity, and recognised him,—hesitated,—then smiled, an uncertain smile of “It is surely he.”

The sudden blow of Hubert’s umbrella broke the pane of glass behind the coachman. He was out in the street in another moment.

“Ah, my dear Lossell, I fancied it was you,” said the man of finance, turning around. “And what brings you to Amsterdam? Out for a lark, I suppose, away from your wife and the babies?”

Mynheer B. was a man of middle age, middle height, and medium abilities. His whole life remained naturally restricted to remembering the names of the people who had lent their money to the State. It does not sound attractive on paper, but it is really a far pleasanter occupation than remembering the names of your own creditors, as most of us are obliged to do. However, Mynheer B. knew that a man must expand his intellect, if he can. And so he made up for whatever monotony there may have been in his calling, by the play of a pleasant humour outside office-hours. Nobody would have dreamed, to see his parchments face and orange eye-balls in his own Department, that the man could laugh after four.

"I came on purpose to see you," cried Hubert.

"To see me? That is unusually kind. I did not know there was so much to see in my humble person. I must tell my wife. It will please her."

"I came for nobody's pleasure," retorted Hubert sternly. "I have just a few minutes before my train leaves again. I can't speak in the street. Will you do me the favour of coming into my cab for a moment?"

"If you don't drive off with me," answered the irrepressible functionary. "Why such haste? Let us take a glass of bitters at the café over yonder."

He dared not proffer an invitation to dinner, for, although he might be head of his own Department, yet his wife was head of her own house.

"I have no time. I shall miss my train as it is," said Hubert hurriedly. And he led the way. So the cab was drawn into a side-street, and there it stood, an encumbrance to traffic, and a source of much vexation to an idle policeman. "There could be no better place for the most secret conference," thought Hubert, as they got in.

But, momentous though its outcome might prove, the conversation in itself could be confined to a few simple questions and answers.

"I merely wanted to ask you," began Hubert abruptly, "whether my step-brother Elias's property, as inscribed in your registers, has been augmented or diminished of late."

Whilst driving to the Bureaux of the "Great Book," he had thought over several methods of indirectly extracting the information he wanted. He had abandoned them all, and now ultimately put his question straight out.

"Do *you* ask me that?" said Mynheer B., suddenly sobered, for this was "business."

"Yes," replied Hubert, colouring to the roots of his hair.

"And yet your brother——"

"I ask you," repeated Hubert vehemently. He caught his breath. "Answer me. Quick!"

"Half a million of your brother's money was drawn out a few days ago. That is to say, speaking incorrectly, I am giving you the real value. The nominal value, at seventy-nine and five-eighths——"

"Never mind about the nominal value," cried Hubert. "Half a million, you say? Is that all? Is that all?"

"My dear Lossell," exclaimed B., as much alarmed as his questioner, "I do hope there has been no fraud! It is almost impossible, with the precautions so wisely demanded! You frighten me! Is there money missing? Have you any suspicions? Who is this Alers? I thought he was your brother Hendrik's wife's brother?"

"Alers!" cried Hubert, casting reticence to the winds. "Yes, that is it. Has Alers fetched money of Elias's?"

"Of course," said the sub-keeper of the National Purse. "It was he who came for the half-million. He had a perfectly legal authority and Power of Attorney. This is terrible. You alarm me more than I can possibly express. I am very glad now that we hesitated this morning."

"How 'hesitated'?" asked Hubert quickly.

"A fresh application was made this very morning for the transfer of another million. One of the officials noticed some slight inaccuracy in the deed which had escaped his observation before—hardly an inaccuracy; some insignificant word was illegible, I believe. Payment was postponed till to-morrow. But, I entreat of you, explain to me what has happened."

"That million, then," stammered Hubert, "is safe?"

"Yes, or there would not have been much left, as you know. But, once more, what is wrong? I assure you the Power of Attorney was perfectly correct, but for that slip of the pen, and all the required formalities had been complied with."

"Thank God," said Hubert softly, "for that slip of the pen."

"But do you mean to tell me," cried B., literally dancing up and down with excitement on the cab-cushions, "that the other half-million has gone astray?"

"No," said Hubert, somewhat recollecting himself, though too tardily. "But I do not trust Alers, and regret that Hendrik should have chosen him to act as proxy for either of us. It is all right, of course: but I regret the choice."

"Still, my dear Lossell, I do not understand——"

"I must be off immediately, if I am to catch my train. I am much obliged to you for your information. It all comes out just as I thought."

"You are too late for your train in any case," expostulated B. "There is another which will bring you in at eight. You had much better take that. And I think you owe me a few words of explanation."

"Nevertheless I must try to catch this one." Hubert called to the coachman and opened the cab-door. Mynheer B. most unwillingly got out.

"But," he said, with his hand on the ledge, "what am I to think? Or to do? If the application be renewed to-morrow——"

"Refuse it," interrupted Hubert vehemently.

"How can we unless some reason for so doing be forthcoming——"

"Refuse it," repeated Hubert. "Refuse it. I tell you, there is a mistake." The horse slowly set itself in motion. "Drive faster!" he shouted to the coachman;—and then to the perplexed gentleman, left standing in the middle of the narrow street: "Refuse it," he cried. "Mind this, you will hear of trouble in a day or two, and Alers will be at the bottom of it. He has been up to some mischief, believe my word!"

He once more sank back into his corner, as the cab



dashed off towards the railway-station, with the irregular swing of a broken gallop, kept up by continued lashes of the whip. He knew all, then, now, all. One great part of Elias's fortune had already disappeared in the vortex of speculation. The rest had been saved, for the moment, by the merest accident. Doubtless, the purchase of the fresh shares had been resolved on. It would take place that evening. And to-morrow, an hour or two before the annual meeting, the money from the "Great Book" would have to be provided as payment. The Power of Attorney was in the hands of—Alers. Within twenty-four hours the news would be all over Holland that the shares of the South Sumatra Company had sunk to one hundred per cent. The great venture in petroleum had also come to Hubert's knowledge by the merest chance. In all probability it was by no means the only one. He stared wildly at his watch lying open in his palm, and bit his lips till they bled. If he missed the train, he would not be back before nightfall. If he missed the train! Only twenty-four hours longer, and Elias was reduced to hopeless poverty, and the great house of Volderdoes Zonen stood bankrupt—fraudulently bankrupt—before the world!

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD.

"THEN, have you got the money?" said Hendrik.

"No," replied Thomas, turning away to the window, with his hands in his pockets, and beginning to whistle softly.

"No? Not got it? What do you mean, Alers? Not got it? And I am to meet Lankater at his Notary's in a couple of hours!" Hendrik started up from the sofa in the young lawyer's room upon which he had been reclining hitherto.

"Well, I haven't got it," repeated Alers sullenly. "He will have to wait for it some twenty hours longer. That is all. You needn't pitch into a fellow so. You are d—— irascible, Lossell."

"But why didn't you bring it back from Amsterdam this morning?" queried Hendrik, somewhat mollified.

"Why didn't you go yourself?" asked Alers sneeringly. "Things aren't always as easy as you think when you haven't done them. The old duffers at the Consols Department have got nothing better to do with their long day than to go turning every florin in their hands a dozen times over. Lucky for you, if they allow the transfer in the end."

"Do you mean to say," asked Hendrik, anxiously, "that there were difficulties?"

"There were," replied Alers. "There sometimes are, Hendrik."

"And they refused to allow you to sell out? Then it seems to me that nothing is left us but to—— What difficulties could they make, Thomas? I never heard of any before."

"There had been none last week. It was a ridiculous trifle about the signature of one of the witnesses not being sufficiently legible. Merely a got-up excuse, I believe, if you ask me for my private opinion, to obtain a little delay on account of the unusual largeness of the sum."

"But did you not point out to them that they had passed the signature last time?"

"No, I didn't," sneered Thomas. "I forgot that little item. Wasn't it stupid of me? What a pity, Hendrik, that you didn't entrust your commission to as great a fool as yourself."

Hendrik remained angrily silent. Presently he began again:

"It was not only last week. It was the other time also—the Transvaal Syndicate time, when the deed was drawn up, several years ago. They said nothing then. I cannot understand it at all."

"Then you will readily forgive my not tiring my head about it," said Alers, his face once more turned to the window. "To-morrow morning the money will be paid, and that must suffice."

"I shall sell all the shares on Monday," said Hendrik.

"If you do so, Elias's money can be paid in again in a day or two."

"And on Tuesday I am to look over the accounts with Hubert."

"Oh, anybody could fool Hubert," said Alers.

"And in a week's time, God willing, I shall really and actually be head of Volderdoes Zonen."

Hendrik had again sunk down on his sofa. Each was occupied with his own thoughts. They were pleasant ones. For each felt that, although he still stood on a ledge half-

way down the abyss, a stout rope hung over his head, at last, within reach.

"I cannot yet understand about that signature," began Hendrik, after a long pause. "I remember the deed being drawn up as if it were yesterday. Show me it for a moment, Tom. You have got it there, I suppose."

"No, I haven't got it," said Thomas.

"In your desk, I mean, of course. You are awfully lazy. You have only got to reach across."

"It is in Amsterdam," said Alers.

"Nonsense. By-the-bye, you say you will get the money to-morrow. How are you going to manage that? You can't get the signature changed."

"I can but give you one bit of advice, Henky," said Alers, facing round menacingly. "Take it to heart. The less questions you ask me, the better—for yourself. Go and settle your contract with those two fellows this evening, and pocket your profits to-morrow, and keep quiet."

"You might remain civil," said Hendrik. "The matter surely concerns me sufficiently to warrant my demanding information."

"It does not," replied Alers savagely. "You are content to pluck the fruits which others point out to you. You have no business to inquire how they were ripened so soon."

His manner disquieted Hendrik. "The validity of the document is all right, I suppose," he said anxiously. "Just fancy, Alers, if there were some fresh difficulty to-morrow. I really dare not settle with my friends this evening, unless I understand more about the whole matter first. I sha'n't go." He crossed his arms. "I wish you would show me the Power of Attorney, and let me judge for myself."

"Have your way," burst out Alers in a passionate whisper. He went over to his desk and unlocked it. "There, take it," he said, and threw across a small roll of stamped paper to his companion.

Hendrik took the document and unfolded it slowly. He glanced hastily over it, and then up at Thomas, his eyes suddenly dilated, his cheeks blanched by alarm.

Thomas stood staring fixedly down at him, his hands in his pockets, his lips puckered up as for a whistle of contempt.

"This is false," gasped Hendrik hoarsely. And then Thomas's whistle broke forth, long and low.

"It isn't the original deed which I gave you." Hendrik went on hurriedly, "It's—it's an exact imitation. Only, the dates are changed."

Thomas stopped whistling. "You did not know," he said, still in the same savage whisper, "that these papers are only available for a limited time."

"I did. But you told me they could be prolonged."

"This one has been prolonged," said Thomas quietly.

"But not in such a manner, Thomas. This—this is not a prolongation of the genuine document. This is a——" He hesitated.

"Well, a what?" asked Alers defiantly.

"A forgery," murmured Hendrik, between his clenched teeth.

The word seemed to exasperate the young lawyer.

"Liar and coward!" he cried aloud. Hendrik sprang to his feet. "Ah, make faces at me, if you choose. It is only I who am to bear the risk, and the chief profit is to be yours. You knew—all men know—that a notary's deeds cannot obtain fresh validity without the consent of all parties. You knew—all men know—that the dates in such deeds are inserted in writing and cannot be changed. All this you knew, and yet you come here and speak smoothly of "not understanding" and of having used this same paper a dozen years ago. Liar and coward again. What a discovery it is for you to notice so suddenly that this deed is the old deed recopied with the necessary alteration of dates!" He, who ordinarily prided himself on the curb

which he kept on his temper, was literally foaming at the mouth.

"I did not know. I call God to witness," stammered Hendrik, thoroughly taken aback by this outburst of rage. "I believed you had hit on some lawful expedient. I wanted to believe it. And I thought you lawyers always could. I never would have deemed it possible for a moment, Alers, that you would do anything which would bring you within the grasp of the law." Alers made a snatch at the document on hearing these words, but Lossell drew back his hand still more rapidly and clutched the paper tight.

"You are afraid," said Alers haughtily. "Of course I knew that all along. Was I not right just now in the names which I chose for you? Do not let us quarrel like two children, because one stops 'pretending.' The unspoken understanding has been perfect between us. I detest explanations. Did I not advise you to avoid them? It was agreed from the first—tacitly—that I was to do the thing and you were to profit by it. We arranged as much on the night of Cornelia's charade."

"It is you who are the liar," cried Hendrik, angry in his turn. "I will prove to you immediately that I have been your innocent accomplice. I refuse to make use of this deed from the moment that I know of its existence. I at least will keep free from the grasp of the law."

Alers saw that the other was in earnest. "Don't be a fool, Hendrik," he said. "The thing's done, and there was no other way of doing it. I really thought you knew that."

"It is a felony," said Hendrik. "How could you, a lawyer, commit so awful a crime?"

"How could you, a Right Worshipful, rob your idiot brother of his money? That, too, is a crime, if you come to bandy such irritating words."

"I do not rob Elias. I merely borrow his money, and restore it the day after, with interest."



"Nor do I defraud him. I only repeat his original declaration, and spare him the unmeaning formality of signing it over again."

"It won't *work*," said Hendrik, shaking his head. "I can't do it. I daren't, if you like that better. But it isn't that. I *won't* commit a crime. Do you hear me? I *won't* commit a crime."

"I hear you," said Thomas. "You needn't scream, like a hysterical woman. Your distinctions between right and wrong are too subtle for me. But you will have to stretch your tender conscience a little in this case. For there's two of us in one boat; remember that. I am not going to be ruined, because of your studies in black and white, Mynheer Hendrik."

"You? Ruined?" cried Hendrik.

"Yes. Do you think nobody may speculate or have debts except your worshipful self? Have you scruples of conscience against paying me my twenty-five per cent.? *That* little paper is not forged."

"I had forgotten," said Hendrik.

"Nothing could go farther to determine the state of your mind at this moment. Come, give me that paper, and stop playing the parson or the fool—it's all one, you wolf in sheep's clothing."

"I must drive out to Elias at once," said Hendrik, as if speaking to himself. "What a mercy it is that I kept the carriage! I must take a notary and get witnesses. I had better ask Linx. And a genuine deed must be made out immediately, in which my name must replace yours. There is no time to be lost. We can keep it from Hubert for a couple of days. Lankater expects me at nine, but will wait. It is the only escape left to us. I won't use that—that counterfeit thing."

"As you like," said Thomas coolly. "Of course, your present plan is simpler, but you will have to make haste. I wish you had thought of it sooner, if it is practicable after

all. That counterfeit thing was used last week, by-the-bye. Ah, true ; you were not aware of that circumstance. Well, be off, if you must fetch Linx. Give me back that paper before you go."

"No," said Hendrik, his hand on the door-handle. He was ready for flight. "I shall lock up this little document, Alers. It is too dangerous in your hands, and it may always come in useful, should you recommence your tricks. You are far more clever and more—peculiar than I thought, Thomas Alers."

The last words he called out as he was already running downstairs. The lawyer dashed after him with a fierce imprecation. But Hendrik, half frightened, half triumphant, was too quick to be caught. He sprang into his brougham.

"You will never see this little paper again until—until it is desirable you should," he cried in French through the open window of the carriage to Thomas, who stood irresolute on the doorstep. "And be careful, or I shall not give you your fifteen per cent."

The diminution was intentional. He was glad to be able to avenge himself on his brother-in-law for many taunts and insults. And why should he pay a percentage which Alers had obtained by such bare-faced villainy? Why should he recompense him at all?

The lawyer stood out in the street, bareheaded, and watched the little carriage hurrying away. He struck his open hand against his mouth and swore another awful oath.

"I must have that paper back to-night," he said. "Even if I kill him to get it!"

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### SHOEMAKER, STICK TO THY LAST.

AN hour later Hendrik Lossell drove up to Elias's door. Linx, the Notary, was in the brougham with him. Linx is not the most highly honoured among the numerous notaries of Koopstad.

And Linx's confidential clerk also came slinking out of the carriage, although the little brougham was in fact only made to hold two. Cornelia had expressly vetoed the makeshift sliding-seat—the "strapontin," as the French call it—which renders these conveyances uncomfortable when they belong to good-natured people. "I was not intended by nature," said Cornelia, "to sit on a strapontin."

So the clerk, for the first time in his life, found himself driving in a private carriage, sandwiched between his employer and one of the merchant-princes of his native city. The memorable fact was squeezed down deep into his soul. It was squeezed so tight that it will remain there to his dying day.

On the box, next to Chris the coachman, sat the lame cobbler, who lives opposite to Linx, and whom that gentleman regularly employs as a witness. The man's name was in all the papers when the smallest details connected with this memorable evening were subsequently dragged into the light of newspaper notoriety. If I remember right, it was—or is—Homan.

"We had much better all go together, Mynheer Los-

sell," Linx had said. "A cab following would mean a procession."

"So be it," said Hendrik. "But I don't want to do anything wrong."

Nonetheless he shuddered involuntarily as he crept out of the carriage. Or perhaps it was only that he shook himself, after having sat cramped so long. The evening shadows were already falling thick and heavy over the spruce little villa and its outhouses. The sun had gone down, and a white, wet mist, such as often follows on fine days in Holland, even in spring, was creeping up on all sides.

"In an hour or so cab or carriage will be unrecognisable," said the Notary, as he too shook himself—with him it must have been a physical shake, for he had not shuddered since he was a boy.

Hendrik cast a glance at the light on the second floor. "He is in his room," he said. "We will go up."

But in the hall Johanna met them, with a look of astonishment on her face, for unexpected visitors were at any hour a source of wonder and distrust in the tranquil, monotonous life of the villa. Hendrik had known that he would come into contact with Johanna. Did anybody ever penetrate to the Fool, otherwise than after this portly guardian angel of sixty had stood aside from the carefully shielded door?

"Gentlemen from the 'Tribunal,'" said Hendrik hurriedly, with a wave of the hand. "We can go up stairs, I suppose, to Elias?"

Johanna was full of fearsome respect for the "Lords of the Court," as she called them. She bowed low, but she ventured on a protest. "Myn Heer is in his room," she said. "I had understood the Heeren Judges were to come on Monday."

"These are not the same," replied Hendrik, as he led the way. "The investigation of Elias's state of health will

take place on Monday." He opened the door of his brother's sitting-room and went in, the others following. But he shut the door on Johanna.

"Who is there?" said Elias. He was sitting in his chair by a small fire which burned brightly in the open hearth. There was no lamp in the room—why should there be?—only the flicker of the flames. Elias was playing spillikens by himself in the dark. A large white cat lay purring in the warmth. The canaries and the parrot were asleep in their cages. And the light from the fire struck sparkling against parts of the parrot's big brass cage, and against a looking-glass at the far end of the large room, and lingered in softer reflections round the golden head, which turned inquiringly towards the open door.

Unavoidably there was something uncanny in Elias's appearance and surroundings, a something which filled you with pity not untouched by awe. He was so lonely, so walled-in on every side, so strangely, enforcedly serene.

At this moment even Hendrik shrank back. The others, huddled in the doorway, remained wondering.

"Who is there?" repeated Elias, a note of alarm in his voice. "Visitors? Who is it?"

Hendrik went up to him, and told him it was he. "And now let us make haste," he added, turning to the Notary. "We have only to get the deed correctly signed."

"Yes," replied the Notary. "Correctly signed. Will you kindly therefore briefly communicate its contents to Mynheer Elias Lossell?"

Hendrik hastily lighted a couple of candles on the mantelpiece, and, sitting down beside his brother, began to speak into his hand. The other three men stood watching him, the cobbler in the background, in the shade.

"Wait a moment," interrupted the Notary. "Excuse me. I will read out the document first to the witnesses, if you please." He held the paper towards the light of the candles and quickly ran through it. It was very short.

Half-way, Hendrik started up, and, crossing to the door, suddenly threw it open. Johanna stood betrayed in the glare of the passage. "Get away," cried Hendrik with an oath. "Don't you trust me with my own brother?" And he banged to the door again.

Johanna did not trust him—least of all after this outburst. She remained in great perplexity of mind. She wished Hubert were here, but she shrank from the publicity of sending John to fetch him. Ultimately she wound herself up to such a pitch of meaningless anxiety, as she sat waiting and listening downstairs, that she resolved to go and fetch him herself. It was some little way to his house in the city, but no harm could come to Elias for the moment. All that she feared was that they would make him sign something—but what? Hendrik was careful enough of the money he hoped to inherit. She did not know what she feared, but she wished Hubert to be apprised that these gentlemen were with Elias. She called John and bade him listen, if his master wanted anything. "She was going into the village. She would be back in a few moments." John stared but said nothing, and presently he went back to the kitchen and shut its door, so that nobody should see he was playing cards with the gardener.

"Abominably curious all these old women are," said Hendrik, as he resumed his seat. To himself he added: "She is sure to cross-question Elias the moment we are gone!" and he took this into account, when he once more began speaking to his brother.

Elias sat following the touches on his hand. And the three men stood and watched.

Suddenly a low voice broke the oppressive silence. "The gentleman is not saying it right," it said. Hendrik started and stared into the darkness, his white face close to his brother's, restless with alarm.

"What do you mean—you—fellow?" he cried. It was the lame cobbler who had spoken.



"The gentleman is not saying it right," repeated the cobbler, taking no notice of Hendrik and addressing the lawyer. "I know the alphabet; my sister's dumb. His signs are a good deal different, but I can understand him. He is telling the other gentleman that some gentlemen are coming to see him, if he will write and ask them to come."

"Oh, Mynheer Lossell!" said the Notary reproachfully.

"Well, what can I do?" burst out Hendrik in French. "If I tell him the truth, this old hag and my brother will be imagining all sorts of mischief. I give you my word I intended to tell him. The woman put this idea in my head!"

"I understand French," said the cobbler in the same 'impersonal' voice. "I learnt my trade in Brussels. My wife's Belgian."

"Hold your tongue," cried Linx, turning sharply on him. "You needn't tell everybody what you understand or don't. I am well aware you know a little French."

And so Hendrik, biting his lips under the humiliation, had to tell his brother, with the lame cobbler's eyes fixed intently on his fingers, that Elias's signature was wanted for a change in the administration of the property.

"What is going to be done with my money?" asked Elias—to everyone's surprise. The Notary looked anxious. He had believed the rich Lossell to be utterly imbecile. Hendrik would have liked to reply: "It is going to be given to the poor," but he dared not, both on account of Johanna's imminent return, and on account of the lame cobbler watching yonder.

"Nothing is to be done with it," he said. "It is going to be taken away from one gentleman who has the care of it and given to another."

"Yes, I know," answered Elias, "Hubert told me. But I don't understand. I thought that you took care of it. And that you gave away what you could of it to the poor."

"Yes, yes; so I do." He turned to the Notary, who, at any rate, had heard Elias's replies. "You see how hopeless it is!" he said.

"Yes, I do," answered the Notary gravely.

"I don't understand," repeated Elias. "I would rather not sign anything. Hubert said I was not to."

"You must," Hendrik spelt quickly, with trembling fingers. He bent forward so as to hide them from the light.

"The gentleman says 'you must,'" proclaimed the cobbler's monotonous voice out of the darkness.

"Mynheer Lossell," said Linx with an impatient frown, "I cannot draw up this deed."

"What?" asked Hendrik, springing from his chair.

"I very much regret causing you any annoyance, but I am *unable* to draw up this deed."

At a glance Hendrik Lossell took in the facts of the case. "Very well," he said stiffly. "I do not press you. There is some mistake on your part. Am I to consider this extraordinary decision irrevocable?"

"I am exceedingly sorry, but your brother does not, at the present moment, appear to require my assistance."

"My carriage will take you as far as the city gate, Mynheer Linx."

"I don't want to give you my money, Hendrik," said Elias, speaking with great decision. "I don't think I can, please. Hubert says I oughtn't to."

Mynheer Linx paused by the open brougham-door and beckoned the lame cobbler towards him.

"Shoemaker, stick to thy last," he said. And then he got into the carriage.

Hendrik remained alone with Elias. He stood, on the opposite side of the hearth, gazing moodily at the sitting figure in front of him. "What now?" he asked himself. In his breast-pocket he felt the forged deed, Thomas

Alers's fabrication. Lankater and Dr. Pillenaar's son-in-law would be waiting for him. He must make haste.

How he hated that big, useless lump of torpid flesh, which lay ceaselessly blocking up his road. At every step, from youth upward—for the last dozen years—this wretched creature had made his life a burden to him. Wealth, greatness, boundless prosperity, everything would have been his but for this step-brother. And now he had nothing; nothing but unending anxiety and hard work; all the labour and little of the fruit. "I am this fool's slave," he said, "his life-slave."

"Hendrik," began Elias, "why did you tell me you had given my money—as much of it as you could—to the poor?"

Hendrik laughed aloud. He vouchsafed the fool no answer.

"Why did you, Hendrik? It was very wrong of you. Hubert says it is there still. He says it mustn't be given away. But you shouldn't have lied to me about it. And I thought I was like Christ."

Still no answer.

"Why don't you answer me?" cried Elias angrily. "And why do you say I must let you have it? Hubert says I mustn't. He says you would not keep up Volderdoes Zonen. Hendrik, is it true that you are harming Volderdoes Zonen?"

Still no answer.

"Who is there?" screamed Elias suddenly, starting from his seat. "There is somebody in the room besides Hendrik. Why, it isn't you, is it?"

But someone—or something—struck him a violent blow on the forehead, and sent him tumbling back into his chair.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### HUBERT'S DELIVERANCE.

It was a quarter past eight when Hubert, footsore and weary, rang the bell at his own house-door. A maid-servant opened it, and, as she stood aside to let him pass, the light from the gas-lamp in the hall fell upon Johanna's waiting figure. "It won't be my master," the girl had said in passing. "He has a latch-key."

"You here——" cried Hubert, starting back.

Johanna came forward. "Yes, Mynheer Hubert," she said. "I wanted to ask you something, if you don't object."

"Come into this room," said Hubert quickly. "No, into this." He stopped in front of the hall-clock. "Twenty minutes past eight," he said. "I came back by the 8.7."

Margaret came out into the hall. "My dear boy," she said in English, "what has happened? Where have you been all day?"

"I had to go to Amsterdam on business," he answered in Dutch. "I came back by the 8.7."

"Well, you must have some dinner immediately. I have rung for it to be sent up."

"I must hear Johanna first.—What is it, Johanna? What do you want?"

"Let her come into the dining-room, and talk to you while you eat."

"No, no," said Hubert. "I will be with you in a moment." He pushed Johanna into a dark room. "Anything wrong with Elias?" he asked.

Then Johanna told him why she had come. It sounded very foolish, she thought, now she gave expression to her fear. The gentlemen were with Myn Heer. She did not like the gentlemen to be with Myn Heer, and Meneer Hubert not to know.

"Quite right," said Hubert, who had been listening intently, while he paced rapidly up and down in the dark. "Quite right. I cannot imagine what these persons should want with your master. Mynheer Hendrik is there also, you say? I will go back with you, as soon as I have had a morsel to eat."

"It is already late," began Johanna hesitatingly. "The gentlemen came before half-past seven——"

"Mevrouw would never forgive me, if I ran out again without a quarter of an hour's rest. You make yourself unnecessarily anxious, Johanna. How could there be anything wrong, with Mynheer Hendrik there?"

Johanna could not answer this.

"Come into the dining-room—and talk to Mevrouw, while I get ready." He led the way, and she was obliged to follow.

He found the other room brilliantly lighted.

"Turn the gas down, please," he said; "it hurts my eyes."

He sat down to table, with his wife facing him, and Johanna on a chair near the wall. But presently he pushed his plate away.

"I can't eat," he said, "with you staring at me all the while."

"Shall we go into the drawing-room till you have done?" proposed Margaret.

"Oh no, stay here. I am not hungry. I am over-tired. What a day it has been!"

"You had hoped to come home earlier," said Margaret.

"Yes, I had intended to come back by the train which gets in at 7.27. I just missed it."

"It is a horrible, dark, misty night," said Margaret. "No weather for you to be out on foot, Johanna, after sunset."

The old woman shrugged her shoulders.

"It is God's weather," she said, "I do not mind it. And I am careful of my steps."

"It is not so dark but that you can see if you choose," interposed Hubert impatiently. "I have eaten enough, Meg. Well, enough for my taste. There are things that worry one and destroy one's appetite."

"I know it," she admitted sympathetically.

At that moment there came a violent ring at the hall-bell. Johanna started to her feet, her ruddy face whitening with sudden terror. "Myn Heer!" she stammered.

Voices were heard outside. A man was pushing his way forward. "I must see your master," they heard him say in excited tones, "at once."

"Oh, what can it be?" cried Margaret, running to the door.

Elias's coachman burst into the room.

"Mynheer, Mynheer," he said, "you must come immediately." He stopped abruptly at sight of the women. But then he went on thick and fast—delighted, after all, as people are, to be the bearer of tremendous news: "You must come, Mynheer! Mynheer Hendrik is lying murdered in the Villa. They found him murdered in Mynheer Elias's room."

Johanna broke into shrieks and sobs and ejaculations. Margaret sank into a chair, white and still. Hubert retained his seat at the table, his face sunk on his hands.

After a few moments of breathless expectation he lifted it. It was composed, but that the eyes were misty with horror. He looked towards his wife. "Alers?" he said.



## CHAPTER L.

### ELIAS'S GUILT.

WHEN Elias came to himself after a few moments of dreamy dozing—he could not have told exactly how long—he slowly remembered that something was wrong—then, suddenly, in a flash, that he had been struck.

He had never been struck in his life before. He sprang to his feet and leaped forward—straight in front of him, in the direction whence the blow had seemed to come. His heart and brain were aflame with a white fury. He knew nothing, thought of nothing, remembered nothing but this one fact of the insult, the injustice, the wound! Struck! He towered high in all the maimed majesty of his powerful manhood and dashed out his great arm to return the blow. First, in the dark of his blindness and his passion, he flung up against one of the candlesticks, which he bore crashing to the ground, but then, turning swiftly, he aimed straight at the man seated on the other side of the mantelpiece, at his enemy, at Hendrik, and struck again and again, fierce, herculean blows, not pausing to think of what he was doing, not able to realize it, had he done so, driven onward only by the unreasoning animal instinct of reprisal and the manlier thirst for revenge. His opponent, to his astonishment—even in that whirlwind of madness—offered no resistance, but sank away from under his hands to the ground. Then Elias paused, and drew back; and a moment later he sank down on his knees and tried to raise the other's head, and broke into loud cries for assistance. John, in the kitchen,

flung down his cards, smitten by sudden reproach, and came running upstairs as fast as he could. He threw open the door and rushed forward, alarmed, indeed, by the sight which met his eyes. The candles of the fallen candlestick had alighted on a sheepskin hearth-rug and set it ablaze, and by the glaring flames, which danced gaily aloft, Hendrik's figure lay clearly illumined, stretched across the floor, with a dark stain beside it on the carpet. By his brother's side knelt Elias, his face distorted, his fair curls thrown back, his great eyes glaring into space.

Ignoring the flames for the first moment, John ran to raise the wounded merchant, who had fallen on his face. He turned the body to the light of the burning rug, but hardly had he done so, when he again let it fall, and also broke into loud cries for help, as he ran back to the door.

In another instant the whole house was in commotion, and a few minutes sufficed to convey the tidings to the neighbouring cottages. The conflagration was soon extinguished, but the dead man was left lying where he had fallen, none daring to touch him till the police had arrived. The coachman, coming back in amazement and distress, to look for the master he had lost, was met by a crowd with the news. Hubert was sent for, and he, fortunately, brought Johanna with him. No one as yet had thought of carrying the news to Cornelia. Besides, that would have been useless. Cornelia had gone with a friend to the Opera.

Elias sat in a corner of the room. No one dared to approach him or attempted to address him. After the first moment of excitement he had sunk into apathy. His eyes were closed. And he neither moved nor spoke.

Doctors came, and policemen, and hurried in and out. The policemen's faces were sternly elated, with the consciousness of a stroke of first-class business on hand. The medical men looked more frightened, but also grave and methodical, impressed, in their way, by the same conviction of business to be done. When Hubert came, he first said

he did not want to see the—the body—was it necessary?—and then he asked for Elias. Johanna had gone up straight to her “Mynheer.” She found him sitting still silent in the chair, into which he had sunk without knowing it. A policeman was standing at the farther end of the large room, by the hearth—and that ugly stain on the carpet. The parrot, disturbed by the unwonted bustle, was trimming himself in his cage and screaming, “Wake up! Wake up!” a thousand times over. On the floor lay a scattered heap of spillikens.

Johanna went immediately towards Elias and took him by the hand and marched him in the direction of the door which communicated with his bedroom. The policeman turned a slow head. “The body is in there,” he said, and jerked his chin.

Johanna broke into an angry exclamation, and led her charge to a spare room next her own. There she put him to bed, helping him to undress and to wash as usual. Elias did not speak, and his nurse was glad it should be so. Only once he said “Sleepy,” and she sat watching him as his eyes fell to.

She crept away from his side, shuddering as she went down the passage, for thought of “the body” at the other end. “God forgive me,” she said to herself, “if He can. I shall never forgive myself.”

In the middle of the night Elias awoke. His brain was clear again, as fools’ brains go. He sat up in bed, and said “Murder.”

Murder. He did not know much about “death” and “killing,” but he knew what “murder” was. Christ had been murdered. Murder was hating a man so utterly that you wanted him to stop seeing, hearing, walking, speaking, that you wanted him to stop being, in a word. And so you tried to prevent his being. You struck him till he could no longer be. And he who did this thing, who made an-

other human being to lie silent like a stick or stone, was a murderer. It was the very worst thing a man could be. The wicked Jews had murdered Christ. And Elias had murdered his brother.

Murder. The whole room was full of it. Room? What did he know of rooms, of limits of space. He opened his horror-struck eyes wide, and they saw as much, or as little, as before—the immensity of darkness. He put out his hand and felt that he was among unusual surroundings. Where was he? In the place where God confines the wicked? Prison, the grave, hell—the idea was all one to him. He was in the darkness—the soul-darkness he had never known thus till this hour.

Heaven and earth were aflame with the cry of murder. It rose up in his heart and flooded his whole existence. It pressed back upon him, and held him by the throat, whenever he tried to shake it off. But he barely tried. His was a mind of few ideas, at the mercy of so merciless a tyrant as this. The wish to do away with, to silence, to annihilate. Elias had murdered his brother, as the Jews had murdered Christ.

He dared not pray. He buried his face in the pillow and longed to be truly blind, that he might not see “murder”; truly deaf, that he might not hear “murder.” He dared not think of forgiveness. There could be no forgiveness for such crime as this. “Sins” to him had meant his childish petulances. He had never heard of anyone forgiving Christ’s murderers. Everybody was still very angry with them, and yet it was a long time ago since Christ was killed. There could be no hope, no escape. There was nothing but this agony, beyond tears, beyond pardon. Nothing but the consciousness, which must remain forever, of being one of the very few among the worst of men.

And he remembered that he had thought he was almost as good as the Lord Christ.

## CHAPTER LI.

### KOOPSTAD CACKLES.

NEXT morning all Koopstad awoke to the delightful horror of a home-brewed tragedy, the genuine article, not an imported scrap in a corner of the newspapers about a massacre in Sicily or Spain, but a tangible, controllable, private-property crime of their own, with the added stimulus of initials which everyone was soon able to decipher, and a "scene of the murder" which everybody could go and stare at, from the outside. It was as different from the ordinary tales in the papers, as going to the theatre is different from reading that there has been a performance in another town.

By ten o'clock on that Saturday morning, then, there was not a child in the city—excepting the babies under three—but knew that the Town-Councillor Hendrik Lossell had been murdered by his mad brother. It was a merciful dispensation that the day should be a half-holiday. There were not police enough in Koopstad to keep order on the road outside the gate. There are never police enough in Koopstad.

The clubs had already heard the news on the preceding night. And the ladies of Koopstad, therefore, were able to communicate it to the whole household before breakfast. There was but one source of supreme disappointment to all. It was that everybody seemed to have received the information simultaneously. Everybody wanted to tell the story, and there was nobody left to tell it to. There was not even

the interest of speculating who could have done it. For everybody knew it was Elias. Still, the why remained, and the how, when and where in all its hundred authentic, fancied and falsified particulars. The few facts were spread, in special editions, over great surfaces of "latest intelligence"; there was nothing done in the city all day but a constant exchanging of scraps of detail which everybody had already read for himself, and happy indeed was the rare individual whose volunteered item of news was met with a "No, I hadn't seen that." Before nightfall fancy portraits of Elias came out, and were sold in the streets at twopence a-piece.

The feeling in Koopstad was not very violent against Elias; it was more regretful. It shook its head. If anything, it was stronger against the twin-brothers Lossell, because they had been so stupid, so culpably stupid, you know. And nobody ever forgives anybody else's stupidity. The stupider I can make you out to be, the less stupid need I appear to myself. It is a game of see-saw, and in see-saw everybody likes to go up. You and I would have foreseen long ago what danger there lies in allowing madmen to go loose. The brothers Lossell had not foreseen this, or perhaps they had not chosen to foresee it. Koopstad looked wise. What was this about a sudden appeal for a curatorship, which had cropped up unexpectedly after all these years? A strange story. Doubtless there was more behind. You could not be very angry with Hendrik, because he was dead. So people spoke doubtfully of Hubert, and eyed him askance, as he drove rapidly, in deep mourning, with sullen, staring face, to the Bureau of the Public Prosecutor.

And then, late in the afternoon, came the news of the liquidation of the South Sumatra Tobacco Company. Its shares fell five hundred per cent. in a couple of hours. Men offered them to each other in the streets. Commercial circles at once sought, though vainly, to connect this event with the murder. Every man of business was loud in de-



nouncing the shameful conspiracy; they were loudest who had made most money by it. Yet it had not been quite so successful as it ought to have been, some of the best-informed whispered to each other. The Royal Sumatra Company, too anxious to make sure of its majority, had bought up far more shares than it required. A million of money had been wasted in that manner. A million is a large sum—even in florins.

It was confidently asserted that, what with one thing and another, Hendrik Lossell would be found to be ruined. Perhaps he had killed himself? suggested solitary individuals, who wanted to be original. The idea spread like wild-fire. Its originators were much irritated to hear that the medical men declared it to be untenable.

“Poor Cornelia,” said somebody. But the somebody was in a minority of one. Like Lot. For all the well-regulated minds of Koopstad understood clearly that if Hendrik was ruined, it was the result of the lady’s living more expensively than her better-born neighbours, and, as Cornelia would doubtless be ruined as well as her dead husband, there was no reason why everybody should not now say so.

Would Volderdoes Zonen go too? That was the foremost, the absorbing question. In how far was the great house responsible for its partner’s private debts? Late at night immense relief was experienced at the clubs by the news that one of the most trusted sub-chiefs had declared, speaking, evidently, for his master, that, although the dead man’s liabilities were enormous, yet by far the greater part of the large fortune of the head of the firm had remained intact. No secret was made of Hendrik’s misdoings. An arrangement would have to be come to with his creditors. But the house of Volderdoes Zonen was saved.

With this declaration men had to be content. It was not possible to get speech of Hubert Lossell. He drove from his house to the Palais de Justice, in Elias’s carriage,

and straight back again to his house. The interview with the criminal authorities lasted an hour and a half.

Not a word of that interview reached the outer world. What would it not have given, could it have guessed that Hubert had declared to the astonished officials that he was convinced of his brother Elias's innocence? These gentlemen, when they first heard him, looked at each other and smiled.

"You will find," said Hubert, "that there was another person who had every reason to desire Hendrik Lossell's death. As the nurse has already told you, the two brothers were not alone last night. Find out who was with them. That is the way to discover the murderer."

"Whom do you suspect, Mynheer Lossell?" asked the Public Prosecutor.

"Will you kindly excuse my postponing my answer to that question?" replied Hubert.

And then, this new hint being given, the whole story gradually developed itself. The Notary and his men were re-examined, and, after them, the servants of the house. The first batch could only repeat their previous statements, but with the servants this second investigation proved more successful. For John, who, loving his place and his outer conscience, had only remembered up till now the arrival of the three men who had accompanied Hendrik, began to recall another circumstance under the stress of questioning. Although expressly forbidden to do so, he had admitted another gentleman, who had rung and asked whether Mynheer Hendrik Lossell were there. The gentleman had insisted on being allowed to go upstairs, unattended. He had tipped John—heavily. The footman had heard the other three coming downstairs a few minutes earlier. He had passed into the hall to let them out. They had driven away in Mynheer Lossell's carriage. When the other gentleman came the carriage had not yet returned.

John did not know the gentleman.

“Ask him,” burst out Hubert, “whether he was tall and thin.”

The man of law frowned. “I am coming to that,” he said. “You must not interrupt, if you please, Mynheer Lossell. If you wish to say whom you suspect, I will gladly give you an opportunity of doing so.”

“Remove this man,” replied Hubert. “I will.”

And, as soon as the door had closed upon John, the merchant said hurriedly: “I suspect my brother’s brother-in-law, the advocate Alers. Get his photograph from Mevrouw Lossell, and you will see. He was concerned in commercial transactions with my brother. My brother was in possession of papers which the other was anxious to recover. It was to institute inquiries about this very subject that I unexpectedly went to Amsterdam yesterday afternoon.”

The photograph was procured, and John was confronted with it. He was asked whether he knew this gentleman.

“Yes,” he said. “It was the gentleman who had come last night.”

They arrested Alers that evening. But they managed to do so without Koopstad knowing of it, out of consideration for his family—for the widow, above all. He was supposed to have gone out of town for a day or two. On Monday a renewed attempt must be made to get some assistance from Elias. But that would almost certainly prove futile. However, fortunately, they hardly wanted it. The whole dénouement was working round plainly enough now. The authorities were astonished to remember how persistently they had suspected the poor, harmless idiot.

But Koopstad knew nothing of this sudden change. And the portraits of the murderer were hawked about under the yellow gaslights all that Saturday night, and everybody who had twopence to spare stopped and bought one.

“I always thought it would prove to be Alers,” said Hubert to his wife, when he came home, jaded and sick,

late in the evening. "Well, it was destiny. We cannot complain. Elias is saved. And so is Volderdoes Zonen. And you and I and the children. They were a bad couple, both of them, Thomas and Hendrik. It was the best thing for Hendrik that he should die—if one comes to think of it. What said your Kingsley? 'You cannot take away human life: it is only the animal life you take away. Very often the best thing you can do for a poor creature is to put him out of the world, saying: We render you back to God, that he may give you a fresh chance in another world, as you have spoilt your chance in this one.' It comes to that. Well, he is right. If Hendrik had lived a day longer he would have ruined us all, and committed crimes which he has now been spared. He may be thankful to the man who killed him."

"God have mercy upon him and us," said Margaret.

"Amen," echoed Hubert with a groan. "If there be a God," he added.

All day long Johanna had striven in vain to rouse Elias from the silent despair in which he lay as one asleep yet dreaming. She had wept till she could weep no longer; she had prayed till the fountain of her prayers seemed to dry up. Not for one instant had she believed in her darling's guilt, but all her attempts to solve the mystery had hitherto proved fruitless. John was dumb in her presence, and secretly hoped all things would turn out well. Elias lay back in his chair, and, if he spoke at all, it was to curse himself and the day upon which he was born and the misery, the misery, of being more evil than all other sons of men. In a moment of maddest rage and hate he had slain his brother. Never again, through all the endless years would Hendrik come back to Cornelia.

"But, Jasje," implored Johanna, "explain why. *Why* is it, my child, that you should have done so awful a thing? But you did not do it."

"He struck me," repeated Elias over and over again, "and I struck him back, and killed him. I was glad."

"But, my son,—the knife! Where did you get the knife from?"

"What knife?" said Elias, waking up, as it were, from his sleep.

"How did you kill Hendrik, do you think?" asked the old woman quickly, bending over him.

"He struck me, and I struck him again, and killed him," said Elias, falling back into his torpor. "I was glad."

"Child, child," spelled Johanna unwarily in her excitement. "What is the matter with you? Why do you tell these things? And the knife then, in his back, through the heart? There was no knife in the sitting-room. The knife used had been taken from your supper-plate in the passage. Had you gone out to get it? You know you had not." She spelled it all out to him more than once.

"The knife!" repeated Elias, sinking away from her, as it were, with closed eyes and knotted brows. "The knife! The knife!"

She could get nothing more out of him.

All through the Sunday eager crowds from Koopstad "moved on" before the villa, lying mysterious with its awful secret, its closed blinds gleaming white beneath the fresh spring sunshine. It was known that "the murderer" had not been removed. He was being watched in the house.

The Juge d'Instruction was to examine him on Monday morning, at the same hour which had originally been set apart for the legal inquiry into his mental condition. People smiled to each other, when this fact was noted. "He has supplied new material, if any was wanting," they said. "There is not much doubt now but that he will be con-



sidered insane. He is a dangerous maniac and must be strictly confined in a madhouse."

"It is evidently a case of homicidal mania," said all the doctors but one.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Dr. Pillenaar.

The police authorities meanwhile were quietly building up the case of the man they had got. The lawyer denied his guilt, of course. He being a lawyer, this was to be expected. But everything seemed as plain as a pike-staff, nonetheless. There was but one difficulty. The dead man's coachman, who had returned to his station by the front-door after Alers had entered the house, swore to having seen his master's shadow move rapidly across the blind a few moments subsequent to what he—Chris—believed to have been the lawyer's departure. For, while the carriage was waiting, a gentleman had issued from the villa, and it was not till this gentleman had disappeared out of sight that the coachman had seen the shadow. But, then, Chris had at first declared to all who would hear him that the dead merchant had also come out at the front-door and had ordered him to drive home. Chris had done so, and had heard the defunct move restlessly in the carriage. "It was his ghost," explained Chris. The Public Prosecutor did not accept the explanation.

Who, then, was this gentleman who had come to the house and gone away? The coachman could not identify Alers because of the dark and the heavy mist. But that was of less importance. The police were quite willing to admit that Chris might have seen the lawyer depart. What they could not attach so much importance to, in the face of all the other evidence, was the exact moment of the appearance of the shadow on the blind. John repeated with vehemence, that he had "never admitted no one but the lawyer."

More portraits of Elias than ever were sold on that beautiful Sunday afternoon. Copies were even bought by



some of the young ladies who had so sincerely regretted that "the prisoned eagle would not pair." The higher classes of Koopstad—the cousins—were reproachful, regretful, annoyed and ashamed. The whole disgraceful scandal ought to have been avoided. Hendrik Lossell did not belong to a class of men of business which had a right to speculate and become bankrupt. And Elias, who—whether idiot or criminal maniac or what not—had always been, and probably still was, the richest man in Koopstad, ought to have been prevented from bringing such public ignominy on his name, on his family, and on the class to which he belonged none the less, but rather a little the more, because he was such an utter fool.

Late in the evening "the richest man in Koopstad" roused himself and said that he wanted his brother Hubert to be sent for to come and see him next morning—before the other gentlemen came.

## CHAPTER LII.

### THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

THE fool sat in his room, by the fireside, with his hands in his lap. His eyes were closed. God had closed them. And in the deep darkness of his soul lay Light made manifest, the Beatific Vision of that which is not, and therefore is eternal.

Johanna went up to him and touched his hand.

"Myn Heer," she said, "Mynheer Hubert is come." Then she turned to leave the two brothers together. "He does not seem to understand," she declared to Hubert Lossell in passing. "But, Mynheer Hubert, he knows nothing of the murder, although he says he did it. Ask him; you will find he did not even know about the knife." Then she broke down, and drew her black silk apron across her face. Hubert had noticed how white and wretched she looked. All her comeliness seemed suddenly to have forsaken her in these last two days.

"Hubert," said Elias, speaking in a whisper (barely audible, for he was unable to modulate it). "Listen, Hubert, are we alone?"

Hubert Lossell came close to his brother and answered, "Yes."

"Quite alone? Are you sure? Is the door shut?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Hubert, why did you take the knife?"

In that moment, for the first time in his life, Hubert Lossell rejoiced with a rush of fierce rejoicing over the blindness he himself had inflicted.

"Listen, Hubert," Elias went on, speaking fast, and louder, though he still believed himself to be whispering, "I remember now. I remember all about it. I mean, not quite all, but enough. There was somebody in the room when they struck me. Was it you or Hendrik struck me? I didn't know you were there then. I can't understand why I didn't know. But before I woke, after the blow, I felt you were there. Were you gone, Hubert, when I struck Hendrik? I don't remember you then. But when Johanna spoke about the knife, I suddenly remembered that you had been there that evening. Then it must have been you that used the knife, Hubert. Johanna says it was the knife killed Hendrik. But she doesn't know, because I killed him too. Why did you kill Hendrik, Hubert, as well as I?"

In a moment the whole confused crowd of conflicting circumstances fell into orderly places and their harmony stood revealed to Hubert's mind. The puzzle was complete. Once more he saw himself hurrying back from Amsterdam, having just caught the earlier train as it was steaming out of the station. Again he heard the incessant, exasperating "Volderdoes Zonen, Volderdoes Zonen," of the thumping carriages all the way down to Koopstad. He had noticed, upon reaching his destination, that it was still early, not yet half-past seven, and he had decided first to run out to the Villa, to obtain from Elias, before he was put to bed, the so necessary information as to the genuineness of the documents which had been used at Amsterdam. He must be certain of this matter first, before he could demand a final explanation of Hendrik. On the way out he had met a carriage—doubtless it was Hendrik's, returning with the Notary—he had not recognized it in the mist. When he reached the house, he had let himself in with a latch-key, which he had constantly used after his return from China (Old Hendrik had had it), and, having seen light in Elias's sitting-room, he had run up thither. But on the landing he had paused, hearing voices, Hendrik's and—and—yes

—Alers's. He had slipped into the adjoining bedroom and listened. Thus he had surprised these two in the midst of their quarrel. He had heard their recriminations, and had soon discovered all the infamy of the forged power of attorney. Hendrik had the document with him, and Hubert had soon heard him declare that, all other means having failed, he was now willing to use it. Furthermore he had heard him affirm that he was going straight to his appointment with Lankater, so that, in another hour at the most, the still obtainable shares would be his. All this Hubert had heard, as he stood listening in the darkness, but he had not been aware that, when Thomas left the house, the lawyer had taken away the forged deed with him in his pocket.

Immediately after Alers's departure Hubert had burst in upon his two brothers. He had found Elias lying motionless in his chair on one side of the fire and Hendrik sitting pensively opposite. He now understood that Alers, on first entering, or perhaps Hendrik, more probably Alers, must have struck down the fool with some blunt object, not to hurt, but to silence him, and to have him out of the way. The interview between the twins had been short, but very violent. Elias must have recovered consciousness, or semi-consciousness, towards its close. Hubert had furiously upbraided his brother, and reproached him with the impending ruin of the house. Hendrik had answered scornfully, had laughed at the other, at his impotent rage, at his got-up tale of the Tobacco Plot and its consequences, at the prospects of misery and misfortune, where success was at last within reach. "I am going to be rich in spite of your envious resolve to keep me poor," he had said. "I am off to Lankater's notary at this moment. And tomorrow, when I am at last head of the house, little Hubert, we can continue this pleasant conversation. Ta-ta." He had run round by the window to depart—it was this shadow which Chris must have seen—but, suddenly bethinking

himself, he had sat down in his former seat for one moment, to fasten a boot-lace.

It was then that Hubert had stabbed him in the back, with a knife which he had caught up from a dumb-waiter standing ready in the passage. He had stabbed him in the name of Justice, in the service of red-handed, right-handed Nemesis, as an executioner, an avenger, a Knight of the Cross.

With one terrified glance at his victim, sitting bent double, the head sunk forward on the knees, and at Elias opposite, apparently senseless, Hubert had fled—from the room, down the deserted staircase, out of the house. He had understood immediately, even before he struck the blow, that suspicion would fall upon Alers. No one knew of his—Hubert's—presence at the villa. He must get back to the town in time to reach home as if he had just arrived by the eight o'clock train. His acquaintance in Amsterdam could testify to his having quitted him too late to catch the preceding one. There had been only one way of rendering this possible. It was past eight already. He had jumped into Hendrik's carriage under cover of the mist—that the tone of their voices was very similar is known to all Koopstad—and, having opened and shut the door once or twice so that the coachman might get tired of looking round, he had slipped out—still under cover of the mist—as soon as the tramrails were reached, and, catching a tram a few moments later, he had found himself at home as soon as, if not sooner than, Alers.

Most of this he had of course known before, though he had had no idea that Elias had been rendered unconscious, but had yet recovered such senses, or part of such senses, as he possessed in time to vaguely realize his second brother's presence in the room. Of Alers's having been there, Elias evidently was not aware, as was only natural, for Alers was not a person whose approach he could have gathered from any other indications than actual information.

Hubert's coming he had felt, as that of all people whom he especially loved. But it was evident that, as he regained a fuller consciousness, he had remembered nothing but the insult, the injury he had received, and springing forward he must have struck what was already the corpse of Hendrik Lossell. This Hubert now understood, and it explained to him how Elias could have so firmly believed himself to be the murderer. It also explained how Elias, knowing nothing of Alers, but remembering, when the wound with the knife was first mentioned, that Hubert had been in the room with him and Hendrik, had learnt to comprehend that the wound with the knife must be Hubert's.

Hubert was happy—no, he was not happy—Hubert was content to know that the police-authorities thought otherwise. It was right that Alers should bear the blame of the murder. For, in reality, Alers was the guilty man. He had slain Hendrik morally. He alone had rendered this physical killing expedient, unavoidable. And it was right, it was just, that, being the intellectual cause of Hendrik's death, he should be punished for it—and he alone.

"Why did you kill Hendrik, Hubert?" repeated Elias after a long pause, "as well as I."

Hubert did not answer him.

"I want to know," the fool continued piteously. "I do so want to know, because I cannot understand. I have been thinking about it day and night; it seems for ages. And my head gets so tired, and then I forget what I thought. You didn't do it, because he struck you? Did you do it, Hubert, you—you, did you do it, because Hendrik wanted to do harm to Volderdoes Zonen?"

Hubert stood—away from his step-brother—by the window. He could not approach to give answer. He would not have known what answer to give.

Doubtless Volderdoes Zonen had been his first thought. But he had not forgotten his children, whose fortunes were so intimately connected with the welfare of the firm. He



desired nothing better than to work for them, and for Elias, and Margaret. The great house must be uplifted out of this slough of destruction. It must be restored to its former repose and solidity, and the blot on its integrity must be wiped out in the course of the spotless years. That would be his mission in future.

The name of Lossell must be as honoured in the future as it had ever been in the past. Koopstad honour. Commercial honour. The honour, not of even balances, which would mean bankruptcy and are to be avoided, but of heavy balances, on the right side, the winning side, that is. Big surpluses, in a word, for these are the only balances to which a wise merchant need pay attention, just as the only scales of which Justice is careful are her scales of increasing costs. Thank God, thou art only a fool, Elias; and of such, in this wide world of Koopstad, is the Kingdom of Heaven.

To restore the greatness of his name before the world, that, henceforth, would be Hubert Lossell's work. He would do it with all his strength of heart and brain. He would bring up his sons to aid him and to work as hard, and as honestly, as he did. Until they took their share of the labour he must work alone. It was his destiny. He accepted it. And he thought of his dead father.

The money was Elias's. It would be more than ever Elias's now, after Hendrik's insolvency, for Hendrik's share in the business would have to be bought up and his debts would have to be paid with the rich step-brother's money. This was unavoidable, and doubtless the judges would authorise the necessary steps. But all must be open and above-board henceforth. And the money must remain Elias's, according to old Volderdoes's will. Hubert would always be a poor man. He could not help it. More than ever, Elias was head of the firm.

But how could he have explained to this unfortunate why it had been his duty to remove Hendrik? Even had he

wished to do so, the thing would have remained manifestly impossible. He must simply deny Elias's charge, which not a soul would believe. Everyone knew that Hubert Lossell had been away at Amsterdam, and on his return, had gone home straight from the station.

And so he was dumb.

"I believe," continued Elias, "that you did it for Volderdoes Zonen. Because you told me before that Hendrik was harming them. That was very wicked of him. But I am sure also that it was very wicked of you to kill him. Don't be angry with me for saying so, Hubert. It was far more wicked of me, because I only did it for myself."

He waited a moment, overpowered by the recollection of his own guilt.

"It was very, very wicked," he went on presently. "Johanna says I didn't kill him, because some one else killed him first. She doesn't know it was you. She says two people can't kill the same person, one after the other. But I know that is wrong, and so I told her, because Pilate killed Christ, and then the Jews killed him afterwards. Mother Margaretha told me so. And of course it's true. I can love Mother Margaretha, and you can love her, and ever so many more people can. And you can hate Hendrik, and I can hate him, though it's very wrong. I don't hate him now; it was only for a minute. I don't know much about what Johanna calls "Death," but I know about killing people by hating them till they don't go on being, and Johanna says they're dead. Christ says we mustn't hate anybody, and that's what they did to Christ. It is the most dreadful wickedness possible. Oh, Hubert"—his face contracted with anxiety—"there is one thing I want to know terribly—I want to ask Mother Margaretha—I *must* know it. It is whether God has ever forgiven Pilate, though everybody here on earth seems so angry with him still."

Hubert stood motionless by the window, his eyes fixed on Elias's.

"Ah, well," said the blind man wearily. "You must find out and tell me. Mother Margaretha must send and tell me, if she mayn't come herself, in that place where Johanna says they will put me; and Johanna says she mayn't. Please remember to ask her about it. Please do."

"Johanna says," he began again, "that they never punish more than one person for killing a dead man. I don't understand; it seems so strange, but I am very glad it should be so. And so, of course, they must punish me, because I was wickedder than you. And, besides, there is Mother Margaretha, and the children; Jack and Winnie, and the babies. And Volderdoes Zonen. I have thought of it all, but my head is very tired. It won't matter much to me, whether I live here, or in another house. Johanna says I shall live in another house, not so nice, but I sha'n't notice. And, oh, Hubert, I hope you will be sorry. It was very, very wicked. And I shall be sorry too."

At last Hubert broke loose from the chain which had held him fettered to his silence. He ran up to Elias and caught his hand, but it was only to spell on its palm: "It wasn't us, Elias. It was another man."

Elias disengaged his fingers and rose from his seat. "Don't, Hubert," he said. "You hurt me. I know it was you, as well as me. If it was other people too, so much the worse for them. I don't know anything about other people. But it was you who came yesterday and killed him. I shall not tell anything about your coming to anybody. Never. And Johanna declares they are always satisfied with one man. But I shall say: 'Gentlemen, it was I who killed my brother. I was angry with him for striking me. You must lock me up.' And you must live to be very, very sorry, Hubert, and, when you think of me, you will know that I am sorry too. I am sure we may ask God to forgive us. I thought not, at first, but I am sure now that we may always do that."

Elias stood erect by the fireplace. At his feet lay the

hideous stain on the carpet, of which he was utterly unconscious. At that moment he saw only the brother who had wronged him in his childhood, whose face he had never beheld since it had outgrown its early infancy. His eyes were blazing with light.

"The gentlemen will be waiting for us," he said. "Dear, dear Hubert, you must be very sorry. And you must be very good to Volderdoes Zonen. I have been thinking, if we are very sorry, and if we pray to God very, very often, always—and I feel sure they will let me pray over there—that at last, perhaps, He may forgive us and make Hendrik not dead again, as the Lord Christ was made. And then Hendrik will be good, and we shall not have killed him. Oh no, I mean *we* shall have killed him, but he will not be killed. And he will come back to Cornelia, as Mother Margaretha, who Johanna said was dead, came back to me. It will all come right, only we must pray very much. We must pray very much, dear brother. I wish you had spoken to me and told me you had done it, and were sorry."

He threw back the long curls from his face and straightened his stately figure, and then, resuming immediately, unconsciously, the slight stoop of his blindness, he walked across the room with even step, and, opening the door and softly closing it behind him, went down to meet his judges.

Hubert, left alone in the room—alone with that stain upon the carpet—stared stupidly for one moment at the door which had just sunk back into its place again. Then he sprang forward with a cry which no one but himself could hear:

"Elias!"

THE END.

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